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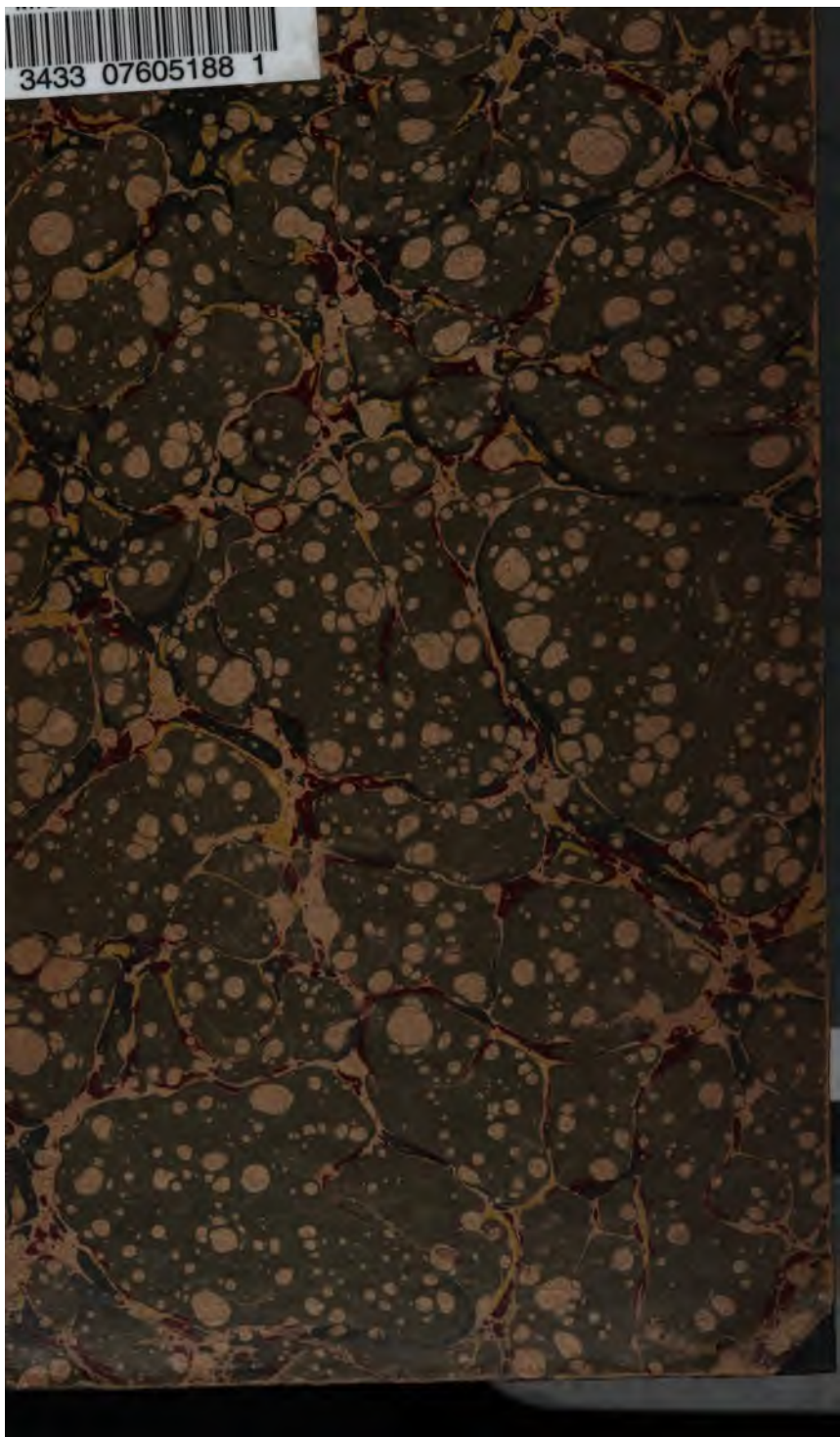
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“A moi! sieur, à moi!”

(See page 72.)

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*"A most silent, & most..."*

*J.M.W. Turner*

1899  
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# THE KNIGHT OF KING'S GUARD

BY  
EWAN MARTIN  
1

Illustrated by  
GILBERT JAMES



BOSTON  
L. C. PAGE AND COMPANY  
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1899

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**Colonial Press :**

**Electrotyped and Printed by C. H. Simonds & Co.**

**Boston, U. S. A.**

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# THE KNIGHT OF KING'S GUARD

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## CHAPTER I

**I** WAS born in the nineteenth year of the reign of King Edward of Cærnarvon at the stead of King's Dene near Torre Abbey, where I was baptized on Candlemas Day in the year of the Saviour, 1327, and have more reasons than one for remembering the exactness of these dates. My father was a yeoman holding service of Alured, Lord Briwere, Baron of King's Guard, and had followed his Lord in his younger days to a great hosting against the Douglas. Having the misfortune to fall prisoner to the Scots, he was most barbarously maimed by having both of his thumbs stricken off and the tendons of his legs cut, such being the horrid custom of these people towards any of our English bowmen whom the chances of war threw into their cruel hands.

He returned a helpless cripple to the West Countrie, and received a small farm adjoining the Abbey lands from his Lord, partly on account of his past services, partly as a dower for the girl whom he took to wife



from amongst the bower-maidens of the first Lady Briwere.

The farm, though small, was profitable, and Lord Briwere, in pity of my father's condition, allowed him for the extent of his lifetime the services of two of his own labouring men for three days a week, subject to the trifling charge of a cup of home-brewed ale apiece for each day they laboured.

Notwithstanding his crippled state, my father was wont to pay great attention to his feoff, and on those days when my Lord's men would come to labour on our farm he would insist upon being drawn forth in the long-oaken box on wheels, which he grimly termed his coffin, wherein he would sit propped up with pillows, and so overwatch the two workmen as they ploughed or reaped according to the time of the year.

Day by day, through his close attention to his farm and my mother's thrift, our stead grew more and more comfortable, and at length the name of Engledew became a byword in the West Countrie for all that goes to make the home of an English yeoman what it should be.

Here my two elder brothers were born, and here, two years after my second brother, Thomas, I opened my eyes for the first time on a world where I was destined to fight, labour, and succeed beyond either the hopes of man or the time allotted by the Holy Book.

It seemed as if Fortune smiled upon me at the font.

The first Lady Briwere had gone to her rest some years before my birth, and the old Baron, lonely and childless, had taken unto himself another mate on the very morning that my mother bore me in her arms to Torre Abbey to receive the saving waters of baptism.

My father, who had been wheeled thence in his oaken cradle, and my mother bearing me in her arms, were

waiting outside the Abbey, hidden amidst a great concourse of my Lord's vassals and tenantry, when the doors were suddenly opened, and a dozen or so of his archers stepped forth and incontinently forced a passage through the crowd for the bridal party, which proceeded from the Abbey amidst the rejoicing of the tenant folk and the shrill clang of my Lord's four trumpeters.

The gallants who preceded the Baron and his Lady, Dame Rosamond, more zealous than the archers, thrust the people still further back, and the one on my Lord's right hand, in forcing my mother and my crippled father back among the crowd, drew his attention to our little family group.

My Lord Alured stopped short upon the steps and asked my parents in his bluff and hearty fashion how they did and what brought them there, whereupon my father, blushing crimson with pride and confusion, commenced some stammering reply, which my mother cut short by informing his Lordship of the cause of our presence at the Abbey, and at the same time held me forth with many becks and courtesies for him to look upon.

"What," says he, "another pledge to the might of England, Dame Ellen, and thou hast given two already! I tell thee, Robin Engledew, that the French and Scots have as much reason to fear the mothers of England as they do the hum of the English arrows. Aye, aye, 'Blessed is he who hath his quiver full,'" and my mother was wont to say in after years that his eyes were wistful as he bent across me.

He then asked my father if he had got me gossibs, and, on learning that no one had as yet consented to act as such, Lord Briwere turned to his bride.

"What say you, sweeting," said he, "shall we two

act as gossibs to the child of the old comrade who interposed his broad breast 'twixt death and myself at Stirling? It were indeed an act of grace, and would well become our wedding day, for I believe that in such small things presented for our rejection or acceptance does God give us our choice between good and evil fortune. Wherefore I take it as a good omen that these worthy folk and their babe should have encountered us here, and so, sweetheart, let us turn back to the church again, and thus commence our new life with one good action at least."

Thus, as I have already mentioned, I have good reason to have the date of my baptism fixed on my mind, inasmuch as it is still recorded in the Abbey books that I, Guy Engledew, son of Robin Engledew, a simple, honest yeoman, had a belted Knight and his Dame to act as sponsors on my behalf on that Candlemas Day of the year of grace 1327.

From my infancy up I was weak and frail in health and body, so much so that my mother told me in after years at times she scarcely hoped to see me live through another winter. As years went on, however, I showed forth other powers than stature and strength of body which raised hopes of ambition in the simple minds of my unlettered parents. Owing to my weak habit of body, in my early youth I was compelled to spend much of my life within doors, where from wandering pilgrims and pardoners I learned such scrap knowledge of French and reading that amongst the yeomen who were wont to visit our farm at King's Dene I was accounted a very marvel of learning.

This reputation, cheaply bought and unrighteously earned, soon came to Lord Briwere's ears. About the time I reached my tenth year my Lord, who had just passed a bitter season of trial in having Dame Rosamond

taken by fever from him and his six-year-old boy, came across to our farm one bright summer morning and spoke apart with my father while I held his roan-grey stallion in the byre. In a little space he returned to his horse, and whilst I held the stirrup for him to mount, my father from his oak cradle called me a young ingrate, and bade me kneel down and pray for blessings on the noble heart who had put the means in my hands of becoming a lettered clerk. My Lord smiled sadly, and patted me upon the crown. He bade me do my duty at the Abbey, and added that I should never want a friend as long as Alured of Briwere lived, and then he rode away with something like a sob in his throat.

I was too young to understand then, but learned it in after years, that the monastic training upon which I soon after entered, was the tribute to heaven which my Lord offered for his dead wife's passage hence, and it was in this way that it came to pass that I was entered at the Abbey of Torre before my eleventh birthday as a scholar-novice of the White Canons.

Beneath the strict though kindly care of Father Edmund, the good Prior of the Abbey, I made great progress in my studies during the six years I tarried with the White Canons, but this increase in knowledge only served to show me the vastness of that sea which work-a-day mouths term learning, and caused me to shrink back in dismay from the possibilities of its depths.

By this time I had learned somewhat of Latin, scrivenry, illumination, and French, such as they speak across the sea, and my teacher had deemed me far enough advanced to take grips with deeper matters, and accordingly set me to study the patristic lore of the Church and the moral philosophy of the ancient heathen writers. These subjects were by no means to my taste,

and it was not long before I conceived an intense dislike, not only to letters, but also to monastic life. As this feeling increased day by day, I felt my heart drawn more and more to the green where the yeomen were wont to practise with the bow, and there I would cower back among the crowd, who laughed at or applauded each shot, and would enviously watch my elder brothers contending with the rest.

By and by I dared to steal my father's great yew bow from the chimney, and bringing it away secretly to the forests that surrounded Torre Abbey, essayed to string it in the loneliness of the greenwood. On the first occasion I spent many hours striving with all my puny strength to bend it sufficiently to slip the twisted silk cord over the nock, and had almost succeeded when the string, which had not been strained since my father used it at Halidon Hill, gave way suddenly, and the bow sprang back and struck me senseless to the ground.

It was near sundown when I recovered consciousness. There was a lump on my forehead the size of a goose egg, and my head was ringing as shrewdly as Saint Paul's bell after the hammer had cleped noon on it; nevertheless, I hid the bow in the underbrush and staggered home, somewhat dizzy and faint, nor did I speak of my accident nor of the place wherein I had spent the afternoon. In nowise disconcerted by this first failure, I straightway procured a fresh bowstring the next morning, and day after day practised stealthily by myself in the forest at stringing and unstringing the bow and shooting with half-arm shafts, until I was able to carry a full clothyrd shaft a good ten score into a palm's breadth, whereupon I commenced to have a high conceit of my own prowess.

Thus did another year pass on, during which my dis-

taste to monastic life grew stronger and stronger, and as this feeling waxed greater so did my love for the merry out-o'-door life in the greenwood grow in proportion.

On one plea or another I would contrive to steal away into the lonely forest, and there couch down in some bracken lair, where I would lie, learning with all my senses the lessons from the great book of Nature, whose leaves were opened all around me.

I would track the unsuspecting red deer, the king of the West Countrie forest beasts, as he made his stately way through the fern, or I would creep after the troops of graceful fallow deer as they stepped daintily on their road to the flag-rimmed brook, and soon learned how to approach the pretty creatures without alarming them. At other times I would watch the wild boars munching the mast at the foot of the tree in whose branches I lay curled up as motionless as the squirrel above me, or look for hours upon the gambols of the rabbits as they played about, unconscious of my near presence, in the warm sunshine before their warrens. In the evenings, whilst I pretended to read, I would sit and listen with all the earnestness of my soul to the speech of my two lusty *freres*, and especially to that of my eldest brother, Thomas, who, though not arrived at manhood, was one of my Lord's under-keepers. My brothers were wont to treat me with great respect on account of my calling, and always addressed me with as much awe as if I had been indeed an ordained clerk; yet when these great strong fellows would speak thus deferentially to me, it would cost me a struggle to keep back my tears, when I thought how gladly I would have exchanged my slight body and my book-learning for their strong limbs and simple, happy lives.

This growing spirit of discontent with my lot, though I did not dare to exhibit it to my father, had little time for development ere it was discovered by Prior Edmund.

"I have noticed of late, Guy," said he, in his grave, gentle way to me one day as we sat at our books, "that thy diligence is weakening, and in its place an impatient restlessness has come upon thee. Tell me, boy, is there anything upon thy mind?"

Lying or dissimulation hath never obtained to any degree among us people of the West Countrie, and on that account I may assert without vanity that I am no exception to the general sort of my race. Therefore when I perceived that my secret was suspected, I made no attempt to deny it, but dropped upon my knees before the Prior, and, unhesitatingly avowing the truth, I told him that I could never resign myself to a clerklly life.

He heard me through with a look of intense surprise, and then asked me why I had become so suddenly resolved upon exchanging a life of security and sufficiency for the toil and danger of the outside world.

"Because," I burst forth passionately, "I feel I am no longer a child, and day by day the blood jumps warmer and warmer from my heart; because I have found out for myself that I love the greenwood and the world better than the white cowl and the dark cloister. Oh, Father Edmund, have pity on me! I am so young, and I want so much to live and taste the joys of life. Believe me, I would be happier in the world even if I were compelled to live like a wild thing of the woods, and couch by night with the deer among the fern, than if I sat as the Abbot of Torre in the carved throne in the chapel."

Then I clipt him about the knees and entreated him to remember that he had known what the outside world

was and had left it of his own accord, but that I, who was so young, was condemned to be immured for ever without having seen one glimpse of it. I reminded him that he had been young himself, and conjured him by the memory of his own youth to have pity on mine, and on that account to ask my father for leave to go to the wars, whereby he would save me from the infamy of taking vows which I could never fulfil.

By this time the tears were running down my cheeks, and as I caught the Prior's hand in mine and drew him towards me I saw that his eyes were wet too.

"My poor Guy," said he sadly, "you know little of the boon you long for. As you say truly, I have tasted of the cup of pleasures which the world offers, and in consequence of mine own experience I would entreat you to abstain from drinking of it too, for it leaveth nothing but sorrow as its after-taste."

I ventured to remark that probably his own experience of the world had been disappointing, and he was on that account embittered against it, but he smiled quietly and shook his head.

"I had no quarrel with the world," said he softly; "no worse feeling towards it than one of great weariness, and yet, Guy, I started in my search for happiness equipped with better gear than you. I wore a knight's golden spurs, I had fair lands, troops of friends, the favour of my King, and all the arrogance of youthful strength and health; moreover I sipped the sweet things which Fortune held out to me with both hands, not like a madman or a drunkard, but circumspectly and with cautious appreciation, and in this way lived my little life of vanity in the world, all the while hungering for happiness and never filled. Then at length came a light upon my jaded soul, and I recognised that joy hath its source from within, not from without. I turned



me from the Dead Sea fruit whereon I had starved so long, and found abiding nourishment for soul and body here in Torre Abbey on the day I offered up my gold spurs and sword on the high altar."

Then he reminded me I was unsuited by reason of my bodily stature and early training to take up the burdens of a soldier's life, which he had abandoned along with the lighter follies of youth for the white cowl and a happiness he had failed to find in war or peace elsewhere. He deprecated any attempt on his part to force me against my conscience into the holy calling I had deemed myself unfitted for, but advised me very earnestly to reconsider my decision ere I left those holy and peaceful walls and went forth among the snares and rough ways that lay beyond them. However, I assured him over and over again of my firm determination to abandon the monastic life, and, on his reluctantly promising to aid me in obtaining my father's consent to offer myself as a soldier to Lord Briwere, I left him, and went home with a fierce but suppressed sense of joy in my heart.

## CHAPTER II

**O**N the following day, Prior Edmund rode across to our stead upon his mule and acquainted my parents of my resolution about leaving the Abbey. My father received the news in silent astonishment, and my mother wept bitterly ; but, notwithstanding the threatening looks of my father, the tears of my mother, and the eloquent reasoning of the worthy Prior, I steadfastly held to my decision of the previous day, and sullenly replied to all their united threats, lamentations, and blandishments that my mind had been made up on these matters long ago.

Father Edmund thereupon sighed, and remarked that I was the best judge of my own disposition, and having bestowed his blessing upon us three he mounted his mule and rode away.

But no sooner was the Prior out of sight when my father immediately recovered from the awe which his presence had cast upon his speech, and he made up for his previous silence. He writhed about in his oaken chest, and bursting forth into a furious rage he reproached me as a fool and an ingrate.

"You were offered a life of ease and power," said he bitterly. "A training that insured your protection—the countenance of those in high places—and you—you who shall be nothing better than a beggar when your parents are gone—have cast all away with as much disdain as though you were a born prince."

I murmured huskily that it was an offence to my conscience to wilfully take vows I had no inclination to abide by.

"Prate about your conscience, quotha!" he roared. "Will your conscience build you a roof to your head or put food into your belly when you are cast upon the world alone? Will your conscience give you the strength and girth necessary for the trade you are so mad as to desire? You a soldier! God's mercy! You, who in stature and girth look like a cloth-yard shaft set on end!"

Then he pointed to his withered legs, shook his mutilated hands in my face, and bade me look upon the guerdons of a soldier's life, and presently his voice became husky, too, and he mumbled thickly that he never should have dreamed that I, in whom he had taken so much pride, would have become so mad, foolish, and headstrong as to break his own heart and alienate my Lord's goodwill.

My mother and I both strove to comfort him, and she joined her voice to mine in argument as to the wisdom of my choice, though I well knew that it was sore against her judgment and inclination.

"Indeed, Robin," she said, "I think you do your own son an injustice, inasmuch as holy Father Edmund himself approves of Guy's choice, and you would not presume to put your opinion against the counsel of a learned canon of the Church. The spirit that leaped in your own heart during your younger days is born again in our lad, and it must e'en out no matter how you would clip its wings, and though he be small of stature—remember he will be but sixteen a month before next Candlemas come, and I warrant that he will make you a very pretty archer some day."

Then she insisted strongly that my father was wrong

in assuming that Lord Briwere would be affronted by my leaving the Abbey, inasmuch as he could not possibly think the worse of me because I would rather wear his colours and carry a pike beneath his banner than lead an easy life in peace at home ; but at this part of her speech my mother broke down, and it took much soothing on my father's part and mine own to restore her to a cheerful mood.

Finally we settled among ourselves that the next day I should wheel over my father in his oaken chest to the Castle of King's Guard, where it was reported my Lord had orders from the King to muster fifty archers for service on the Northern Marches, and that I should offer myself as a substitute for any one unwilling to go, although my father laughed at the idea of my being accepted as anything but a horse-boy. Accordingly on the following morning we set forth at daybreak for King's Guard. Before we started I borrowed my brother's bow along with a quiverful of half-arm shafts and placed them in the oak chest by my father's side, and though I could not help flushing at some of his jibes as I laid the weapons by him, we had both good reasons afterwards for being thankful that I brought them.

That day and all the incidents connected with it are still fresh in my memory, though it is now more than forty years since.

It was a fine, clear summer morning. The sun was shining brightly, the birds were singing in the woods about Torre as though they would burst their hearts for very joy, and my own young soul was light-headed with the happiness of the out-door world I was about to plunge into. We went by a bye-path for a mile or so and then came upon the high-road, but here I encountered a rude shock, for the first thing mine eyes

lightened on was a gibbet by the roadside with the half-naked body of a felon hanging from the cross-beam.

A horrid stench came across the sweet summer air from the corpse, and a huge raven that had been sitting on the bowed head, rose with a soul-startling croak, while at the same time the body turned slowly round in the breeze and presented to my terrified gaze a horrid face, rendered still more horrid by the absence of the eyes which the foul bird had picked out.

This sight was so inexpressibly shocking to me that I immediately stopped. It appeared to me to be a bad omen, and I would have certainly abandoned my enterprise on the spot and returned to the Abbey had not my father given vent to a harsh laugh, and scoffed at my terror in such contemptuous terms that I was perforce compelled to push on past the horrid tree and its ghastly load.

Some two miles or so further on we were overtaken by a well-dressed horseman to whom I touched my cap respectfully, inasmuch as he appeared to be of superior rank to the ordinary. He shortened his reins as he came abreast of us, inquiring courteously to what place we journeyed ; and, on learning our destination, he deigned to ride alongside for some distance in very friendly conversation with my father. I remember how I marvelled at the time that he should keep one corner of his green, saye riding-cloak folded before his mouth, for the morning was extremely sultry ; but it was not until we had journeyed some miles amicably together that I suddenly discovered his object in muffling his face.

We had arrived at a place where the trees grew close to the roadside when he suddenly reined in his horse, and in a rough, harsh voice he ordered me to halt. I obeyed him in much astonishment, wondering what he

wanted, but he did not leave us long in doubt as to his intentions, because in the same fierce tones he bade my father hand over his money on the spot.

"And do not think I will be put off by a silver sixpence!" said he brutally, "because I am well acquainted with the ways of you cripple beggars, and can count on your having received more than one rose-noble from the fat Canons of Torre, from whence I have no doubt you have just twined."

It was in vain that my father protested that he was a poor yeoman and did not follow begging for a living. In vain he assured him that he had not a silver penny upon him. The horseman only replied, with oaths and threats, that if we did not hand over our money immediately he would chop us into collops on the spot, and rake out the silver from the bits of our two carcasses afterwards.

Then my father lost his small stock of patience, and, deploring his own crippled state that prevented him defending himself, he cursed the other lustily for a coward, whereupon the ruffian suddenly unsheathed his sword and urged his horse close enough to strike. However, the moment he drew his weapon, and when I saw the steel shine breast-high in his hand, I recovered my presence of mind on the instant, and snatching my brother's bow from the chest I fitted an arrow to the string and shot it as quick as thought into the robber's body.

He gave one great gasping cry and dropped the folds of his saye riding-cloak and his sword together. Then he turned his face on mine with a look of terror and astonishment that I shall never forget, and set off, clinging to and swaying in his saddle, at a gallop along the hard high-road. However, I was not inclined to let him escape so easily, for my blood was by this time

boiling, and before he had gone a score of yards I had fitted another shaft to the bowstring, and stepping forward a pace drew it to my ear and set the grey goose-wings trembling between his shoulder blades.

He sat so very straight for a horse's length that I thought at first I had missed him altogether, but presently he leaned to one side, and after rocking for a moment in his stirrups he fell heavily to the ground. I picked up the robber's own sword, and running over to him set my foot upon his neck and bade him surrender or I would cut off his head, but he never answered me, and in some alarm I looked close into his face, which still bore the same look of terror and surprise, and perceived that he was stone dead.

I must own that the feelings which overwhelmed me then made me sick and faint. I knew well that his life was forfeit to the law. I was almost certain there was innocent blood already upon his hands, and I was fully conscious that if I had not acted as promptly as I did he would have certainly slain both my father and myself.

Still, I was so fresh from the quiet Abbey life, and scenes of violence were so new to me, that I do not wonder now at my terror as I stood on the high-road to Torre on that bright summer morning with the robber's corpse weltering in blood at my feet.

However, my father was possessed of other sentiments. He swore loudly, laughed uproariously, beat his maimed hands against the side of his oak chest as he was wont to do when excited, and protested to Heaven that it was as pretty a piece of shooting as ever he had been fortunate enough to witness. When I returned all of a tremble to him, bearing the robber's sword in my hand and struggling against a great inclination to weep or swoon or do both together, he

endeavoured to climb out of the chest to embrace me, and after I had sufficiently recovered my composure to resume our journey he kept repeating to himself all the rest of the way with many bursts of laughter, "Hand out your silver, quotha. Take that, quoth Guy, and claps two arrows into his ribs. Holy Saint Audrey, but it was a quick answer."

As we drew near the outworks of King's Guard, we saw by the motley gathering that swarmed near the drawbridge what a stir and bustle the news concerning the muster of Lord Alured's levy had caused.

There were gypsies and jongleurs, begging monks, pedlars, and all the rabble that gathers wherever a muster of soldiers is being held, in the pretty certain expectation of obtaining a goodly share of their silver pieces; for from long experience I have observed that men about to start upon an expedition wherein their lives are like to be in danger are on such occasions very prone to throw their money into the nearest hands stretched out to receive it.

Mingled among this disorderly throng I observed some of Lord Alured's archers: a few of them, indeed, moving soberly about with their wives and little ones, but the greater number of them chaffering or engaged in noisy altercation with the pedlars and gypsies.

While making our way through the crowd a drunken archer, who was staggering about with his arms loaded with all manner of useless trifles, threw one armful into my father's box with some rough jest. This raised the easily excited anger of my parent, and casting them out roughly, he so roundly abused the drunken giver that he was likely to be ill-used by him had not a grizzled old man-at-arms, recognising my father, pacified the archer and obtained for us entrance to the courtyard, where my Lord Alured was inspecting



a great heap of military stores in company with his cousin, Sir Thomas Siaward, and two bare-armed master-armourers.

My Lord was dressed in a simple habit of Lincoln green, and but for the egret feather in his cap and the gold chain about his neck might have passed for one of his own chief-foresters.

He bore a restless and fluttering merlin upon his wrist, which he endeavoured to quiet with his disengaged hand, while he fed her from time to time with little gobbets of raw flesh that an overgrown page at his side bore on a wooden charger.

He greeted us kindly, and, though still directing the disposal of the stores, heard through the somewhat lame explanation of our presence which my father delivered unto him.

"What," cried the Baron, "does the little clerk grow weary of his books and hunger for the life of a paladin? That bundle of shafts will not do, Hal Panton, for service in the North; they are barely heavy enough to serve for cross-bow bolts. Saint Thomas of Canterbury, look at the child who hath ambition to tackle the Scots—those gaunt, red savages who eat their prisoners raw!"

He plucked his restless falcon by the hood, vowed he would put her to a course of low diet that would tame her humorous pride if she fretted much more, turned to the chief armourer again, and bade him cast one mail-coat as unserviceable and mend another with fresh rivets, and then asked Sir Thomas Siaward abruptly what answer he was to give to such a small would-be drinker of man's blood as myself.

My Lord's cousin turned his swarthy face to mine and scanned me contemptuously with his dark eyes. With the quick instinct of youth I felt that this man


was already mine enemy, and an evil and a dangerous one at that ; so I therefore take some pride to myself at the present time that I hated him from the moment I set eyes on him with all the strength of my boyish soul.

"The proper answer to such whelps," said he, with a scornful jerk of his head towards me, "is best given with the buckle-end of a baldric on the crupper, and, since you ask my counsel, Alured, I should rede you to have the young shaveling whipped soundly, and then send him back to his books, for that is all such young curs are fit for."

My eyes filled slowly with tears, and for the moment I thought my heart would burst, inasmuch as I knew well that the Baron was wont to set much store upon his cousin's advice, and invariably followed his counsel ; but my father came quickly to my assistance, or else, God help me, I might have been a monk at the present day.

"Now, under your pardon, good Sir Thomas," said he with some warmth, for he was of a bold and fearless nature, and though he did stand much in awe of Baron, Knight, and Priest, yet when there was needs he would have spoken his mind to the King himself rather than remain silent under a wrong. "Now, under your pardon, but you do the lad a great injustice, inasmuch as I myself have seen him this morning bend a bow with as much skill as any archer in King's Guard" ; and then with increasing excitement he described my encounter with the robber upon the high-road.

"Yes, my Lord Alured," he continued, hammering his thumbless hands upon the rim of his wheeled box, "the bloody-minded villain said, 'Out with your silver,' and it would have done your heart good to have seen how gracefully my young springald sent two shafts into



him—one into the brisket and the other into his back. Indeed, he did, my Lord, for here is the villain's sword in witness thereof, and if you want further proof, your Lordship may see the dead body lying on the road a mile from here with the shafts sticking in the carrion."

The while my father rambled on with his story, Lord Alured said never a word, but he fixed on me such a strange but not unkindly look, that I was at a loss to know where to set my eyes. Presently he unbuckled from his wrist the leash which ran through the rings of the falcon's jesses, all the while regarding me with a look of amusement and keenness.

"Ye say, Robin," said he slowly, "that he was a middle-sized man with a close-cropped beard and wearing a green saye riding courtpye—if it could be—and yet it seems impossible. Here, Tom o' the Hobs, take 'Havoc' and shut her up in the mews in a dark cage. By my faith, Robin, if thy lad hath slain the man I think he hath, I shall make ye both made men. However, I shall soon know—— Ho! Jack of King's Ford and Tom Ladly, mount and ride along the high-road towards Torre until ye come upon a dead man in a green saye cloak. Hew me off his head, and bring it back to me at the gallop, and if any should seek to hinder ye, say ye are upon the King's business and mine."

In little more than half an hour the two men-at-arms returned, and one of them, dismounting, presented the severed head of the robber to my Lord. The man held it out at arm's length with as much indifference as though it were a turnip, and I noticed there was the same set look of terror upon the dead face as when I had last seen it; so I shivered and shrank back, whilst Lord Briwere took it in his gloved hands and turned it about curiously as if in search of some mark upon it.

Presently he handed it back to the man-at-arms, regarded me for a moment with a wide-lidded stare and turned to Sir Thomas Siaward.

"Cousin," said he with an oath and a laugh, "thou wert wrong as to the qualities of this young gamecock, for he has slain no other than the Day Owl himself. Tom Ladly, bring that carrion to Southampton, seek out Master Bassett, the Sheriff, in his lodging in Anchor Lane—greet him well from me, and give him that head as an earnest that Roger Woodward shall lay no further tax upon the King's wool-staples or levy toll upon the highway from this forward."

Then he called me a little quiverful of mettle, and told my father he ought to be proud of me, inasmuch as I was like to turn out a better archer than ever he had been in his best days.

"He hath slain the curse of the West Countrie," he continued; "and though it was assuredly a chance, a mere flash of luck, yet he is a brave boy, and shows some dexterity with the yew-stave. Natheless, he is much too young to bear arms for some time yet, but I shall take him on at King's Guard as a foot page, and a few years hence I shall find him a saddle amongst my men-at-arms. And now, little clerk," said he to me, "take off thy barret cap and hold it forth," whereupon he drew forth out of his doublet a green silk purse, which he opened and tumbled its contents, which amounted to some thirty-eight pieces of silver, into my cap.

I would have gladly declined the gift, but he answered, laughing, that I was now one of the craft of the goose-winged clothyard shaft, and must e'en receive the pay for my first day's work, and so, perforce, I was compelled to accept the guerdon along with my new position of page to himself.

### CHAPTER III

I HAD much dislike to keep this price of blood, and my father, for his part, also resolutely refused to have aught to do with it.

I accordingly did up the money in a napkin and regarded it as an unhallowed possession until I had an opportunity of bringing it to Torre Abbey, where I left it in fee for the soul of the dead robber by placing it in the chest devoted to the maintenance of the poor.

However, I had no such scruples about retaining the Day Owl's sword, and a few days after, when the horror of having slain him had gone from my mind, I left it with old Hal Panton, the chief armourer, with instructions to keep it against the day when I would be old enough to wear a blade upon my hip.

Hal turned the sword about, and examined it from point to tang. He tested the rivets, struck the edge against the great oak beam that ran athwart the ceiling of his smoky workshop, and then observed that it was a good blade, which, from its colour and temper, had evidently been forged in the Levant.

"You do well, boy, to keep it," said he gravely, "and that for more reasons than its excellence, inasmuch as if one does not take something, no matter how trifling, from the body of the first man one slays, they say the dead man's ghost is apt to haunt the slayer ever after."

That this is true I myself can vouch for, inasmuch as I mind me of young Ned Wintown, of Newtown Abbot, who was with me in Flanders, and who would not go out of his way by a bowshot to obtain the charm from the body of the Frenchman he slew. He laughed me to scorn, and said he believed none of those old wives' tales ; but six months afterwards, when he lay dying in Bruges of a fever, the poor lad did rave and rave about the dead Frenchman who, he said, stood grinning and mowing at his bed-foot, though, indeed, I cannot say that I could see him myself, yet I have no doubt that it was as poor Ned did affirm. Yes, boy, you do well to retain the sword, and I shall keep it well oiled for you against the time when you are fit to gird it on."

Whether the words Hal Panton said are truth or otherwise I know not, for I have all my life been a simple-living and plain-thinking man, who has never inquired deeply into those spiritual manifestations concerning which so many deep readers and deep drinkers are alike wont to testify. Still I have kept that sword till even now, and oftentimes the sight of it brings back to my mind all my life year by year and day by day. It has been re-hilted three times—first with a plain iron cross-bar, secondly with a silver half-guard, and on the third occasion it received the hilt of pierced steel set with jewels which it now bears, when I had it refurbished for the coronation of King Richard ; yet, if I except a few notches along the edge, its blade is still as bright and keen as the day I took it from the dead robber. Whether it is owing to the fact that I have kept it all these years by me, or that my conscience is a healthy one, I cannot say, but I can vouch that neither the spirit of the dead Day Owl nor any of those whom I slew in battle afterwards ever troubled my rest or sleep.

The life I now entered on gave me but little leisure for dreaming in the greenwood as I was wont to do heretofore.

I had to rise long before daybreak on such days as my Lord went out hunting or hawking with his neighbour, Lord d'Mohun, but I was never permitted to accompany the jolly throng which went forth over the drawbridge of King's Guard amid the whistling of the hawks, the yelling of the dogs, and the whoop and bugle-notes of the foresters.

Left alone in the castle at such times with but few books, and those mostly of a theological character, I accordingly drifted, as if by instinct, to the workshop of honest old Hal Panton, the chief armourer, where I would help him by blowing his bellows or would sit on his bench and listen for hours to his tales of the wars in the North or Flanders. At odd times, when he had but little to do, he would teach me how to weld and forge or the proper fashioning of rivets, which he had learnt to do in the Spanish fashion abroad, and in this way I became acquainted with something of the armourer's craft. He also taught me fence and ward, which I would practise alone, just as I was wont to do with my father's bow in the forests of Torre, until mine arms ached and my hands were swollen (for I exercised my left as well as my right hand, and became equally dexterous with either), and so within a year I became a very fair sword and buckler man.

I also became proficient in the use of the quarter-staves ; indeed, I may say too proficient, for I cracked the head of Tom o' the Hobs, the overgrown page, while we were toying with them one day, and in consequence had to groom my Lord's hunting palfreys for a month unaided. Lord Briwere was immensely

diverted by my victory over my fellow-page, who was a good cubit taller than I, but he would not permit any of the grooms to aid me in looking after the two hunting steeds which were the special care of his pages, so my triumph cost me somewhat more than it was worth.

In the evenings I was required to attend upon my Lord, his son, young Lord Hubert, and Sir Thomas Siaward, as they supped at the daïs. My duties were to pour forth my Lord's wine, and after supper to bring him a napkin of flowered Flanders damask and a silver bowl of rosewater; but even these trifling services often kept me out of bed until far into the night, when I was so weary that I could hardly stand upright behind my Lord's carved chair.

Yet, looking down the steps by which I have climbed up to the Order and the Golden Spurs, I am convinced that these and other sundry disciplines that I underwent were nevertheless the best training I could have undergone, and I am therefore of opinion that the old custom is good—namely, that all noble youths, desirous of bearing arms, should serve for a period as pages, inasmuch as they can thus learn reverence, courtesy, and self-control, which are such necessary virtues for an aspirant to the Order of Chivalry.

It was about the end of the second year of my service at King's Guard that the event occurred which so much changed not only my own life, but also the fortunes of so many others.

I was lying sound asleep one night in my bed in the eastern turret, dreaming of the deer and the greenwood, which were thoughts always present in my happier dreams, when I was awakened roughly, and opening my eyes I perceived my master and his neighbour, Lord d'Mohun, standing by my bedside.

It was about that hour when night and morning are



struggling for the ownership of the heavens, for I remember well how dusky grey was the sky outside my open window and how ghastly white appeared the faces of the two men by my bedside in the early light. My Lord carried a lamp, and I noticed that it shook strangely in his hand as he asked me in a strained, unaccustomed tone of voice if I could write. I was greatly startled by his appearance and mystified by his question; however, I made shift to answer him in the affirmative, whereupon he bade me dress and follow him.

While I was clothing myself I heard Lord d'Mohun remark peevishly that I was a mere boy, but my master replied unsteadily that, notwithstanding my youth, he could trust his life to my fidelity.

"That may be," said d'Mohun impatiently, "but there are others among us who may have a natural hesitation about trusting a mere boy with the inmost secrets of the best blood in England."

"I am quite willing to do all openly," cried my Lord angrily, "quite willing to do all openly without this hugger-mugger of bonds and oaths—but what say the others? A bond—a sealed bond, interchangeably signed by all and, if no other agreement will suit them, then they must needs have this boy in the devil's name or go without it, inasmuch as he is the only soul in King's Guard who knoweth aught of scrivenry."

His companion muttered in his beard that it was a perilous experiment to trust so much in an untried vessel, but my Lord replied significantly that the oath of the association should be administered unto me likewise, and there was little likelihood of my revealing aught after such a seal had been laid upon my lips.

They then bade me accompany them, and they led me downstairs and into the great hall which was lighted up with flambeaux as brightly as if it were midday.

The room was filled with a great crowd of the West Country lords and knights, and as I glanced round and recognised them one by one a cold sense of dread came upon me, though as yet I knew not what reason I had cause to fear. Their rank and names have nothing to say to my humble history, suffice it is to say that they were the greatest number of the greatest might in England, and there was more than one among them who had Royal blood in his veins.

On the table, which had been reset in the centre of the hall, lay a couple of skins of parchment, an inkhorn, a bundle of pens, a lighted taper, and a great bar of red wax, and my Lord pointing to them bade me sit down and write whatsoever should be dictated to me.

Several of those present offered the same objection to my being employed as a scribe that Lord d'Mohun had already raised and, were it not for the impatient eagerness of some present, it is probable that I should have been sent away, and that my life should have thus been spared a long series of persecutions and cruelties.

However, the hasty temper of my Lord settled my fate.

"Good friends," said he fiercely, "if there is this much counsel over so trivial a matter as to what hand shall write down the wording of this precious contract, our children's sons are like to be grey-beards ere the wrongs now preying on the bowels of England are settled. I prithee, gentlemen, dismiss such petty questions and consider gravely what dangers threaten ourselves.

"I myself have—almost at my very gates—a liege vassal who fits him out ships to plunder the Frenchman for his own profit. I bid him disarm them and lay them up—he answers me by fitting out another fresh one. I summon him to account for his conduct—he shuts him-

self up in his keep. I send my seneschal to hale him here by the neck, and he flouts him to his beard and answers that he hath the King's authority to do what he pleaseth on the common enemy. And so it is with many of us. Every day some fresh law worms into our rights and each of us have in turn already experienced some encroachment of our power. For my part I am sick of all this talk of petitions and leagues and so forth, and I hereby avow that I am willing to face matters with the sword, without contract or covenant, upon the assurance that at least two of you will follow me."

Six or eight started up and cried out that they wanted no contract sealed between them, and that they would follow him to the death in defence of their rights and privileges; but the majority were in favour of a clear understanding, and after some further debate it was agreed by all that the resolution of the assembled league should be embodied in a solemn covenant.

I was then sworn never to reveal by word, writing, sign, or look, either the context of the bond about to be dictated to me or the names attached to it by an oath of such dreadful wording that the mere recollection of it makes me shudder to this day, and as soon as I had taken the oath I was set to work to engross the covenant. My hand shook as I wrote and the characters seemed to dance on the parchment, for, young as I was, I saw that each line carried treason and death along with every word. However, I at length succeeded in completing my task, and then my Lord bade me read it aloud.

When I had finished reciting its contents in fear and trembling, a dead chill seemed to settle upon the boldest present.

The first person to speak was Lord d'Mohun.

"Sir Alured," said he in a calm and steady voice, "in all lawful measures I am heart and soul with you, and

will join you in open remonstrance against the encroachments which vex the Barons of England, but I shall not lend voice or hand to the cause on those terms."

My Lord spun round upon his heels and faced him with his eyes shining and his white beard bristling with wrath. Many of the assembled malcontents stirred uneasily in their seats, and four or five rose to their feet and gripped their daggers suggestively, but Lord d'Mohun turned his head from left to right and looked upon them one by one in such a calm, deliberate fashion that it seemed as if he did turn them into statues by sheer glamour.

"My Lords," said he coolly, "my oath is sacred, and I shall hold no cell in my memory for the records of this dark night's work. Yet, ere we part, Alured of King's Guard, let me remind you and all these other noble gentlemen of one great man's fate yet fresh in our minds—REMEMBER LANCASTER, ROYAL LANCASTER! Remember that Royal blood and high motives were unable to save even him from the axe."

Again there was a chilling silence, and then Sir Thomas Siaward spake—

"My Lord d'Mohun," said he, with a sneering laugh, "the eagle that fears to soar must e'en content itself with the food of the meaner fowl."

Thereupon three of the assembled Barons sprang up and stretched out their hands for the goose-quill I held but, ere they could reach it, Sir Alured plucked it from my trembling fingers and bent him down across the bond. Then did I utterly forget not only the presence of those around but also the humble position I stood in towards my Lord, for I incontinently flung myself weeping at his feet and implored him to have nothing to do with the accursed script that my hand had unwillingly penned.

He stared at me, so overwhelmed with my presumption that he was unable to find his voice for quite a space ; but presently he recovered from his amazement and, thrusting me roughly from him, bade me stand up and witness the signatures of those able to sign their names and the crosses of such as were unable to write.

When the seals of all who joined the league had been set upon the parchment I was curtly dismissed to my room. There, dressed as I was, I flung myself down on my bed, but not to sleep, for I lay wakeful and quaking until it was time to rise ; and the next night, and, indeed, for many a night after, my sleep was disturbed, for, sleeping or waking, I was haunted by vague but none the less terrifying shadows.

## CHAPTER IV

**A**BOUT a month after this event there was a great muster of the powers of King's Guard. None of the vassals knew or appeared to care wherefore they had been assembled, but I myself felt sure it was on some weighty expedition, inasmuch as every man owning allegiance to Lord Briwere, save Master Tyrlawney of Hope's Dene (he who had fitted out ships against the Frenchman against his liege Lord's command), was in his place in the Court o' Guard on the day appointed.

The morning before they set out I ventured somewhat rashly to remind my Lord that he had promised me a place among his archers some two years back.

"Go to, lad, go to," said he angrily. "What I have promised, that will I perform in its own good time. Alured of Briwere neither forgets a promise nor requires his page to remind him of his plighted word."

I craved his pardon very humbly, and assured him that my love for his person, and not any desire to aid his memory, had prompted me to be so bold, whereupon he laughed and tapped me playfully upon the shoulder with his riding gloves.

"You are too young to bear arms, Guy," said he smiling, "and the first day's march under the weight of a soldier's arms and scrip would kill you. You yourself must own that you have not added an inch to your

height since you came to King's Guard, and you must therefore wait patiently until you are tall enough to don a quilted jacket and a salade."

What my Lord said about me was partly true, inasmuch as since my fifteenth year I had not increased in stature by as much as a barley-corn, and this lack of inches at that time was a grievous sorrow to me. In addition to my slight stature I possessed a very smooth, fresh complexion which, with my crop of fine yellow hair, gave me the appearance of being at least five years younger than I really was.

The fresh complexion is now brown and wrinkled, and my hair is grizzled by forty years' suns and showers, but I am no taller at this day than I was at fifteen. Yet my small stature is no longer a source of shame unto me, inasmuch as experience hath taught me that an undersized man is not necessarily a despicable foe and, if his eye and hand are well-trained and his heart is big enough, I should rate him as the equal of the bulkiest lance in Europe, whether in the field or in the lists.

However, this is wandering from the track of my history, and I therefore return to the conversation I had with my Lord ere he set out on his last expedition.

"My lord," said I, gathering courage from his smiling face, "although I am not of great stature, there is not a bow among your yeomen that I cannot bend, nor a horse in the stables of King's Guard whose pride I am unable to tame. My dearest thought is to serve you, and as I feel fit enough to bear arms already, I prithee let me serve your Lordship with bow and blade as my father did before me."

"Thou art a good lad, Engledew," said my Lord, and his voice was even more kindly than usual, "but there are other ways of serving than by lifting a spear or bow. It is enough that I have thy welfare at heart, and when

the time comes thou shalt be made acquaint with my intentions concerning thee."

Thus was the time for me to bear arms put off for an indefinite space, and from the little chamber in the Barbican, where the windlasses and engines used for raising and lowering the drawbridge were worked, did I sorrowfully watch the men-at-arms, clad in mail coats and mounted on good Flemish horses, go forth the next day with much trampling and jangling of accoutrements. Behind them, four abreast, in quilted jerkins and plate-ribbed hose, passed forth the archers with their well-filled quivers and cased bows swinging jauntily at their backs. As the latter passed beneath the echoing arch of the Barbican they raised such a cheer which roared and thundered in the narrow passage that I seemed to feel the floor of the stout, stone building quivering beneath my feet; and thrice again did they raise a mighty cheer and thrice did they wind their bugle-horns in unison as they descended the road that wound like a snake from King's Guard to the far-off highway.

I watched them winding in and out among the under-wood until I lost sight of them among the trees, and then I climbed in hot haste up the steep stairs to the top of the eastern turret where the beacon grate stood. I mounted the ladder that led up to the cage, climbed up over its red-rusted bars and stood upright on the fuel itself with my feet braced against the stanchions. Poised like a bird upon this dizzy height, I remained with my eyes fixed on a spot about three miles distant, where a tiny white patch among the trees marked where the highway wound for a short distance in full view of my perch.

Presently I saw a fine, powdery dust rise and hover like a sea-mist over the spot and then, faintly but distinctly, I heard the silver-like cadence of a score of



bugle-horns blowing the Mot of Lord Briwere. I eagerly watched this patch of dust, amidst which the occasional flash of armour or twinkle of spear-heads was visible, until it began to settle once more upon the road, and then I climbed down sullenly from the beacon-grate and descended to my chamber, all the while thinking bitterly of my Lord's last words, and upbraiding him in my mind.

"He took that awkward Tom o' the Hobs," thought I angrily. "He whom I can thrash with one hand—a ninnyhammer—a knave—a coward—a dolt that can neither groom nor sit a horse—pah! Out on my Lord's fair promises, but it seems as if he doth intend that I should still remain a monk, notwithstanding the fact that I wear his coat."

Later on, when I learned more experience, I took much shame to myself for these thoughts, but a peevish and ill-tempered boy is ill able to value the kindness of those who have his best interests at heart. I did not know then, nor, indeed, did I learn for many years afterwards from good Father Edmund of Torre, what generous provisions had my noble master made for my future.

Though my Lord Briwere was not destined to fulfil his good will towards me, inasmuch as he passed under the wing of the Dread Shadow on the day whereon he rode forth from King's Guard at the head of his powers, yet do I feel heartfully grateful to his memory even yet for his intentions towards me. Well, God assoyle his soul! Men may speak slightly of his memory and add calumny to his faults now that he is resolved into dust, but I will maintain that he was a good and gentle protector not only to myself but also to hundreds of others in their degree.

The Castle was now under the seneschalship of Sir

Thomas Siaward, and as Lord Alured had left behind but a poor dozen of men-at-arms in garrison, Sir Thomas brought across a score of his own men from his manor of Hopewood. And truly they were a throng of as evil companions as ever stopped honest men upon the King's highway.

They were all good archers and stout soldiers, ever ready to back an oath with a blow, and back the blow in turn with the sword-point, and as they and Lord Alured's men disagreed from the first day they met, it is not to be wondered at that there were many brawls betwixt them wherein baldric belts and sometimes sharper weapons were used. It was not long before I myself was entangled in one of these almost daily encounters. Notwithstanding my peaceful training, I had never at any time of my life been one who would have tamely borne an insult and, as our small and divided garrison was kept cooped close together without any opportunity of avoiding the Seneschal's men, I was perforce obliged to take the same chances of having a quarrel thrust upon me as my comrades.

When Lord Alured set forth, I was appointed to act as page to young Lord Hubert, his only son and heir. He was about sixteen years of age, a proud, silent, ill-tempered lad. Except in person and features he had little of his father about him, and I used to marvel how so kindly and gentle a man as Lord Briwere could have begotten a son so unlike him in disposition. The only reason I could account for his cold, haughty nature was that he had never known a mother's care during his childhood, and having been reared among hireling sycophants he had lost, or rather never experienced, the gentle influence which good women, and especially good mothers, exercise over the early character of a man.

It was in vain I strove to gain his good-will by every

effort in my power, but he was as insensible to the joys and sorrows of those inferior to him in rank as he was callous to the sufferings of the horses and dogs that he punished cruelly for faults that were often due to his own ignorance and mismanagement.

Once I nursed him through a fever when my Lord, his father, was absent in the North. However, he bore me little love for my pains, inasmuch as when he was well and I had barely recovered of the infection I had caught from him, he made me ride, ill and unfit as I was, to Plymouth, to buy him some sugared French fruits he desired. Once or twice on the way back I was compelled to dismount and lie down on the grass from sheer weakness, and yet when I returned to King's Guard he rated me fiercely, first because I had been so long upon the road and afterwards because the vile French trash was not to his liking.

However, if he was cold and heartless to me, so was he to all his father's vassals, and while I had no cause to complain of worse treatment than others, I had good reason to remember his protection of me on one occasion which I shall presently relate.

About three weeks after my Lord set out, I was in the court o' guard one afternoon engaged in dressing the wounded fore-pad of one of my young Lord's greyhounds, when one of Sir Thomas Siaward's swash-bucklers rode in hot and miry. He cast his eyes about until he spied me, and then he bade me come to him and hold his horse.

"Good sir," said I, busying myself still with the wounded dog. "Does he require two to hold him?"

"No, Tino, my young bedmaker," said the ruffler impatiently. "Why do you ply me with questions when I bid you do a thing?"

"Then," I replied without turning my head, "you can hold him yourself."

I heard him gasp as if in astonishment, but after a moment or two he dismounted and walked very slowly over to where I knelt.

"What, cockerel," said he with an oath, "methinks you crow over loud for one of your years."

And then he dealt me a blow with his gauntleted hand that tumbled myself and the dog over together. I was on my feet in a moment, and without thinking of the consequences I dealt him such a blow on the point of the chin that all his teeth clicked together like a spring trap, and he danced back unsteadily over the cobble stones twice his own length. However, he quickly recovered his balance, and whipping out his sword, immediately rushed at me like a madman. As I was weaponless, and had no liking to be murdered, I turned and ran like a deer towards the guardroom. He pursued me close, all the while thrusting viciously at my back, and swearing that he would spit me like a capon, so I ran up to the sentinel on guard, and begged him to protect me. Unluckily for me, the fellow was one of Sir Thomas's men, and when he saw whom my pursuer was, he leaned easily on his sword and burst out laughing in my face, so I wasted no further prayers upon him, but wrested his weapon from him in a twinkling, and then faced my enemy with my point low and my heart high.

He rushed at me furiously and let drive with his point, but he was a very indifferent swordsman, and I had no difficulty in turning his clumsy thrust. Then he chopped heavily at my crown, but I caught his blade with a half-arm ward, and at the same time laid open his cheek from temple to chin with an upward cut, and succeeded in getting under his guard and disarming him.

While I stood menacing him at my sword-point, Sir Thomas and some others came into the baillie to see what all the coil was about, and on seeing one of his own men bleeding and myself facing him with a drawn sword, he uttered an exclamation, and bade his men disarm me. Three of them leapt upon me and I was instantly rendered as helpless as a child.

"Now," said he, with a smile on his thin lips which he licked much in the same fashion as I have seen a cat do ere she plays with the mouse she hath caught, "now will I teach this young eyas that he cannot fly at all the game he sees."

I vainly protested that the quarrel was none of my seeking, and that I had endeavoured to save myself from my assailant by other means than by fighting him.

"That may be," said Sir Thomas, in as pleasant a voice as though he were ordering me some agreeable posnet, "but thy hot young blood needs some physic badly, and I purpose to cool it through the medium of a sound whipping. Strip off his jerkin and shirt, my lads, and bind him neck and heels upon yonder ladder."

It was done almost as quickly as the words were spoken.

"Now, Maurice Brook," said he to his chief huntsman, "go to the mews, fetch the heaviest dog-whip there, and lay me two dozen of the hardest on his back."

I cried out piteously—first for mercy and then, seeing how vain was such an appeal, for the boon of being killed offhand rather than he should put me to such shame, but at this juncture my young Lord came strolling up easily.

He looked at me somewhat indifferently, and then said, without the slightest heat or passion—

"Release my page Kinglew, and strap me down in his place you sullen ruffian with the slashed cheek."

The Seneschal started as though he had felt the whip descend upon his own shoulders, and he turned as white as death.

"Wherefore, Hubert, wherefore?" he stammered, the words coming from his mouth as though his throat was full of hot ashes. "Wherefore, in the name of reason, should you order my man, Wilmer, to undergo such indignity?"

"Because, good cousin," said my young Lord coolly, "I myself saw the whole affair from my chamber window, and therefore have the testimony of mine own excellent eye-sight to convince me that Wilmer was the aggressor. I do not say that my page does not merit the whip but, by the cleft crown of Thomas of Canterbury, I shall not permit you to mete out punishment to him, and if you should desire to know my excuse, it is briefly on account of the foolish reason that he is mine—mine, cousin, mine, *mine* to do what I please with."

He once more ordered those around to bind down Wilmer on the ladder, at the same time hinting that it were best for them that they did his bidding without further delay, and then he turned to Sir Thomas Siaward, who was glaring at him in an age of speechless rage.

"Nay," he continued, speaking more sharply than he had hitherto done. "Do not look at me in that fashion, good coz, for though you be Seneschal of King's Guard, remember that I am Master. Bear this also in mind, good cousin, that the Lords of these parts are their own justiciaries, and in my father's absence I will suffer no one but myself to mell or meddle with man, boy, horse, dog, or any of my other chattels."

By this time my late assailant and I had changed places, and Brook stood by, whip in hand, looking from Lord Hubert to his cousin in sullen indecision.

"There, good fellows," said my young Lord cheer-

fully, "that is as it ought to be—and now, cousin, as you seem so fond of the sight of a good whipping, you can see the stripes administered according to your heart's desire. Now, Brook, lay sixty lashes on his back, and mark ye, my gentle sir, that they are laid on with a will or you will assuredly find yourself ornamenting the ladder when you have finished."

Then, to the great diversion of Lord Hubert, and the impotent rage of Sir Thomas, Maurice Brook laid on the allotted number of strokes, while Lord Hubert counted each whistling blow with much relish. After the first ten had fallen, it made me sick to look upon the raw and bleeding back that writhed upon the ladder like the shape of some hell-tortured sinner, and after the twentieth I was obliged to close my eyes and thrust my fingers into my ears, to shut out the man's shrieks of agony that rang through the Castle, and frightened the very horses in the stables.

When the last blow had fallen and Brook stood panting and sweating with the exertions of his degrading office, my Lord slowly surveyed the white faces of those who stood around, and then pointed significantly to the tortured shape upon the ladder.

"Mark ye, my gentle friends," said he in the cold fashion he was wont to speak in, "the penalty for brawling in a royal fortress ; and hark ye, the next time I will make it eighty lashes for those who draw swords without my orders in King's Guard."

He made a sign and some of the bystanders cut loose the senseless wretch and bore him off to the leech, and then he turned to me and languidly bade me go to his chamber for his silver comfit-box and some rose essence to shake upon his napkin.

It was a fortnight ere the flogged man was able to move about, and then he only walked forth at dusk

with so much stealth and so like a lost ghost that I dreaded to look upon him. About this time I observed that the screws were removed from the socket which received the bolt upon my door and, in much uneasy apprehension of intended treachery, I brought up to my room a small arbalist I had found in a corner of Hal Panton's workshop and kept it below my bed with a diamond-headed quarrel in the bight of the bended string.

That very night I was awakened by hearing the settle stool, which I had braced against the door, grate along the floor, and presently the door itself was slowly pushed open. I was fully awake in a moment, and putting my hand down on the floor where the bended crossbow lay, took it up and remained perfectly motionless until I saw the dim figure of a man slip into the room. Then I raised my arbalist softly and, taking a careful aim at that panel of the door which was nearest to him, sent the quarrel crashing through the stout oak board.

My visitor seemed very much disconcerted, for he cried out on the name of God in a very startled fashion and whisked out much more quickly than he had come in. I heard his feet patter on the stairs and I ran out of my room whinger in hand, to overtake him if possible, but he was too quick for me, and when I reached the landing and peered down the circular stair, the turret appeared to be as lonely and deserted as the shaft of a deep well.

The next morning, as I was strolling on the battlements with my arbalist in my hand, I met my late enemy, Wilmer, hobbling along with his face still enveloped in bandages. At the same moment I encountered him, I observed a crow wheel round the topmost turret and finally settle on the beacon grate.



I stopped instantly, wound up my arbalist with the moulinet, placed a bolt in the groove, and taking careful aim knocked the crow into a puff of feathers in the blue spring sky. I then looked significantly into the white face of my late antagonist and remarked that a man's head across a room was a better mark than a crow on a turret top, and walked off feeling well satisfied that I should have no more mysterious figures slipping into my room o' nights.

That afternoon a small group of sorely-wounded men dragged themselves painfully up the bridle path to King's Guard. When they were admitted I recognised among other familiar faces that of my fellow-page, Tom o' the Hobs. He had a great roll of linen swathed round his head somewhat like the head-dress that Crusaders describe as being worn by the Infidels, but when I unrolled this immense bandage, amidst many groans and sighs on his part, all I could discover was a small wound about the breadth of a sixpence, which he said was inflicted by a mace, but which appeared to me to be more like what a riding-switch would have caused.

He told me such a tale of battle and butchery that, if I had not known his weak and cowardly nature, would have led me to believe that there had not been a man left alive in England on the other side of the Tamar.

"I did all a man could do, Guy," said he plaintively, "but a most monstrous man-at-arms struck me to the earth with a steel mace that must have weighed twenty pounds at the least. Even after that I was loth to leave my Lord, and would have remained with him had not he himself ordered me to return with the wounded to King's Guard, where he said I would be of more use than by his side."

Which decision of Lord Alured, I could not help

thinking, was a very just estimation of Tom's value as a fighting man.

Notwithstanding my distrust of the account I heard from Tom, I could not doubt that there had been serious work to do, for amongst the others, who numbered in all about a score, there were none who did not exhibit the marks of battle in the form of ill-bandaged wounds, pallid faces, and battered armour. I noted, too, with some surprise, that there was scarcely one among them who did not bear, either on his body or his clothing, the unmistakable signs of fire, and, full of curiosity to know the true account of the action wherein my Lord had been engaged, I shook myself free from Tom o' the Hobs and drew close to the group of wounded men.

I addressed myself to a tall, lean archer with whom I was acquainted, and begged him for news of the late encounter.

"Yes!" said the man savagely, turning his grimed and unshaven face to mine. "Yes, you are like the rest of them, all curiosity to know what sent us home in this plight, but so wanting in Christian charity that ye have not the grace to offer a wounded comrade a cup of ale and a truss of clean straw to lie upon."

I ran into the stables and brought forth an armful of fodder, which I shook down in a corner for him to lie upon, and then hastened to fetch him some food and wine from the buttery. When he had ate and drank his fill I proceeded to bandage a thrust in his bow arm, and whilst engaged in that friendly service he told me of his own accord what had befallen him and his comrades.

After leaving King's Guard they had marched in a northerly direction until they came to Hope's Dene, where they halted before the peel tower of Master

Tyrlawney and invested it on all sides. They lay around the tower for two days exchanging shots with the garrison until at the end of that time Tyrlawney hung out a white flag and craved a parley. He offered to yield up the tower if he and his men were assured of life and pardon, but Lord Briwere's anger was not to be appeased by anything less than an unconditional surrender and Tyrlawney refused to accept such doubtful conditions. The most that the Baron would grant was a free egress from Hope's Dene for the women and children, and as soon as they had withdrawn and passed through the investing army the final attack upon the peel tower began. Dry brushwood, furze, and other combustibles were heaped up on some country carts and then wheeled up to the gate. My Lord lost several stout archers during this operation, inasmuch as Tyrlawney's men poured forth many flights upon them, knowing well, poor souls, what would follow if the gate went down. However, notwithstanding their valiant defence, the fuel was at length heaped up against the door, and a few minutes later the tower itself was wrapped in fire and smoke.

Just at this point of my comrade's narrative my Lord Hubert came into the court, clad in hunting jerkin and hose, russet riding-boots and spurs, as though dressed for the chase, and, calling me impatiently by name, he bade me saddle and trap two horses immediately and accompany him abroad.

## CHAPTER V

**I** SADDLED and bridled the horses as quick as my hands would let me, for I was wild to be out on the moors, inasmuch as I had not been beyond the gate of King's Guard for over three weeks. However, my young Lord's haste to be gone far exceeded mine. He stood flogging his long, close-fitting riding-boots with his switch as though he would thus urge me to greater speed, and when I held the stirrup for him to mount he scarcely waited to thrust his right foot in the off-stirrup ere he was thundering over the drawbridge at full gallop.

I waited long enough to sling on my arbalist and a pouch of bolts and then followed him in high spirits. He rode furiously and unskilfully, and it was only by dint of hard pricking that I succeeded in keeping a lance-span behind him. Presently the ground became more broken and treacherous, and his carelessness was so marked that I mustered courage to force my horse closer to his and beg him to ride slower, or at least to pay more attention to his bridle hand. However, he either did not hear me or would not hear me, and as I knew well how dangerous it was to cross his will in anything I fell back a horse's length behind him and held on with undiminished pace, all the while praying that our horses might not step into a rabbit hole and

keeping mine eyes warily bended on the ground we seemed to fly over.

In this mad fashion we raced on for nearly ten miles, and every minute I expected to see one or both of our horses fall down from sheer exhaustion. By the course we went I saw that my young Lord was heading for the Hobs, and I was commencing to wonder if he intended to ride so far at this headlong pace, when we suddenly surmounted the hill that overlooked Hope's Dene and my Lord pulled in his labouring horse. I gladly reined in my own panting animal and looked down—but looked in vain—for the well-remembered peel tower of Tyrlawney. It was gone, turrets, linhays, gables and all—gone as if it had never existed, and in its place was nothing but a mound of scorched stones, charred beams, and other rubbish from which, even then, small flickering jets of smoke were curling.

We descended the hill and rode slowly towards this shapeless heap. As we drew near, I observed two human feet, or rather what had once been flesh and bone, but which were no longer anything but burned-out cinders, sticking out of the smoking ruins clad in a pair of scorched iron sollerts, and presently I caught sight of a shrivelled hand and arm protruding from the rubbish in one place and a horrible, charred face in another. I shuddered and thought how dreadfully had Lord Alured Briwere set the marks of his vengeance on the lands of Tyrlawney, but I would have been more horrified if I had known at that moment that every one of the brave little garrison of Hope's Dene, numbering twelve gallant English bowmen in all, were lying under those blackened stones.

At the present day I am no expounder of the law, nor have I ever inquired deeply into those subtle degrees of duty due by one rank to the other imme-

diately above it. I hold, as I have ever devoutly held, that the authority of the King is paramount, and if it should please him to release the meanest of his subjects from any feudal obligation that it is not for the overlord of such a subject to gainsay the release made by the highest source of power in the land of England. Therefore, boy as I was at the time, when I sat viewing the ruin of what had once been the home of a sturdy English yeoman I felt a strong sense of indignation swell up within me. I knew well that the unhappy Tyrlawney had fitted out ships to prey upon the French for his own gain against the express command of his Baron, nevertheless he had express permission to do so from the King himself, who was doing all in his power at that time to encourage our West Countrie folk to harry the enemy ; wherefore, notwithstanding the affectionate way I cherish Lord Alured's memory even to this day, I can never regard the slaughter of Hope's Dene as anything less than a ferocious blot upon an otherwise noble and generous character.

Young Lord Hubert looked upon the smoking heap with a proud, exultant look.

"Ha ! Master Tyrlawney," he cried between his set teeth, "ye know now that the sport which commences with twitching the lion's whiskers is bound to end beneath the lion's pounces."

At the sound of his voice a withered heap, which I had hitherto deemed to be some castaway rags, started up among the bracken and caused both our horses to rear and plunge violently. As this shape rose it took the form of a very elfish, bent, old woman, upon whose hag-like features and lean arms the wrinkled skin hung like fire-scorched parchment. She stretched one thin arm towards us, and cried out in a cracked, quavering voice—

"Woe worth the day, ye two! Woe on the butcher and his journeymen! The curse of the widow and the orphan on all who wear his badge and hunt and harry with his murderous pack."

I shrank back in fear and crossed myself, terror-stricken by her denunciation, but my young Lord Hubert, notwithstanding the pallor of his face, regarded the shrivelled crone with a scornful look, and addressed himself to the task of quieting his frightened horse.

"He came in the morning light," continued the old woman, raising her voice until it screeched and whistled like the wind-point on the turret of King's Guard on a stormy night. "He came in the morning light, and he left in blood and darkness. And ye two shall pass in blood and darkness also. Aye, mark my words, in blood and darkness shall ye pass!"

I beat my breast softly and placed my name-saint between me and her, but my young master continued to survey her with the same look of unruffled contempt until she paused for lack of breath.

"Guy," said he, as coolly as if he were bidding me loose a shaft at a stag, "unsling your crossbow and bring me down yon foul-mouthed old witch."

"In good sooth, my Lord," I replied in some heat, "I shall do no such cowardly deed. The poor old creature is but some half-witted dependent of Tyr-lawney, and her little share of reason is so unhinged by his death that she knows not what she says. Nay, my Lord," I continued, at the same time catching his bridle and reining his horse back, for he was attempting to trample the poor wretch under foot, "an I will not do murder at your bidding, neither will I permit you to do so yourself."

He struggled furiously with me for a space, but, as I

was stronger than three such, and a far better horseman into the bargain, I continued to rein back his horse, all the while crying out to the old hæg to begone as she valued her life. Presently he became quite calm, and glancing back over my shoulder I perceived that we were alone, the old woman having disappeared in the meanwhile as suddenly as if the earth had swallowed her up. I thereupon released his bridle, and the moment I did so he turned about without a word and set his face towards King's Guard.

We rode home slowly and silently, and it was almost evening when we passed in under the gate. I swung myself out of the saddle the moment we reached the court and advanced to Lord Hubert's side to take his bridle. He dismounted very slowly, and then regarded me with the cold, dead look which his face assumed when most angry.

"Engledew," said he harshly, "you not only disobeyed my orders to-day, but you also dared to lay hand upon my bridle."

"Yes, my Lord——," I began.

"Yes, hound!" he screamed in a transport of fury, and at the same time he cut me across the face with his riding switch.

I thank God to this day that my sword at that moment happened to be hanging up in my room and not on my hip, or else I might have stained my hands with the blood of him to whom I owed so much.

"You are the son of my dear Lord and benefactor," I cried, weeping with shame as I felt the hot blood gush over my face, "but I would not bear that from our Holy Father the Pope himself," and I gave him a buffet that stretched him on the stable yard.

As I stood mad and bleeding over him, Sir Thomas Siaward and Master Bassett, the Sheriff of South-



ampton, rode into the yard, and the two dismounted and drew their weapons in a trice.

I stepped back from my prostrate master, who rose white and silent, and Sir Thomas, divining immediately what had happened, called out for the guard, who immediately came running up and halted for orders.

"Bind him," he cried joyfully, "bind him, lads, and see that you ward him safe. He hath stricken the Governor of a royal fortress, and that according to law is punishable by death. My dear cousin, it is indeed opportune that Master Bassett happened to be with me, inasmuch as with his assistance and that of the jury which we can assemble here we shall have this young gentleman comfortably tucked up over the gate with a rope round his craig by breakfast-time to-morrow."

I looked around for some place to set my back against, resolved, if I could, to wrest a sword from the first who should approach and so die fighting; and I felt so hardened, desperate and indifferent to my fate at the moment, that I scarcely felt any surprise or joy when Lord Hubert turned fiercely on his cousin and bade him send back the guard to the barbican.

"I have told you once before, Master Siaward," said he, with increasing passion, "that I will not have any one—no, not even King Edward himself—mell or meddle with my men. Mark you that, good cousin, now and for all time. And mark again, that when one of my vassals merits death, or any lesser punishment, I, and not a jury of twelve men, shall decide the question."

I had no doubt that it was nothing but his jealous dislike of Sir Thomas Siaward's interference that prevented Lord Hubert from ordering me to instant death, inasmuch as the power of inflicting that punishment was the dread privilege bestowed upon the holders of King's Guard by Richard the Lion-Hearted. I knew

well that my young master could order my instant execution at any moment that such a command might fit in with his changeful mood, and yet I felt heartfully grateful to him just then for the indefinite reprieve he granted, and I could have blessed him aloud when he walked off sullenly by himself and left me standing there with the shadow of death hanging over me, but nevertheless free and unfettered.

I stole away to Hal Panton's deserted workshop, which was the only spot in the Castle wherein I would be likely to be left alone, and there sat down on a little bench in a dark corner, with my hands clasped in front of me and my eyes fixed vacantly on the ground. In this position I pondered in a half-dazed state over my dangerous and hapless condition, and after a while I fell sound asleep from sheer weariness, with my back against the wall and my head bowed down upon my breast.

I must have been asleep for some hours, because I had a long, strange dream wherein I suffered many varied experiences. Methought I was back in Torre Abbey again, and that many years had passed, for I found myself no longer an acolyte, but a grown man and an ordained Canon. Presently I dreamed that the trees around the Abbey commenced to whisper, whisper, whisper to me to return to them, and all the old longing for the greenwood came upon me with a twofold strength. I fought against the temptation for some while in an agony of prayer, but at length a stag belled afar off in the woods, and I yielded to the glamour of the forest and stole forth like a guilty thing, clad in my Canon's robes and bearing a bow in my hand and a quiver at my back. A fine red deer appeared flankwise to me in an opening goyal, whereupon I fitted an arrow to the string and set it just behind its shoulder, but as

the mighty animal sank down upon its knees it turned its eyes to me, and I saw that instead of a deer's head it bore a human face, which I recognised immediately as that of the evil, sneering countenance of Sir Thomas Siaward.

The shock was so great that I started up half awake, and finding myself in the dark commenced to wonder stupidly where I had been sleeping. I had barely recollected where I was, when I heard voices approaching the armourer's shop, and the next moment my heart stood still, for Sir Thomas Siaward, bearing a lighted guard-lamp in his hand, entered the smithy in company with Master Bassett.

Both men were armed—Sir Thomas in complete mail, Master Bassett in a suit of half armour—and there was a set and dangerous look upon both their faces that told me plainly that my life would be in no little danger if they should catch me listening to their conversation. Fortunately for me, the lamp was ill-trimmed and gave forth a choked and spluttering light which did not reach the corner where I crouched like an owl, and so I kept my presence of mind and remained perfectly still, wondering all the while what they wanted in so grimy and lonely a spot.

Sir Thomas set the lamp upon an anvil and stretched out his hand with an impatient gesture, whereupon Bassett produced from under his cloak a couple of stumpy little knives and a strange iron instrument, which he handed to his companion with trembling fingers. The Seneschal tossed down the knives upon the anvil and turned the iron instrument about in his hands, all the while regarding it with a look of curiosity and interest.

It was shaped like a gigantic spur, with large round knobs at the ends, and the only way it differed in shape

from an ordinary spur was in the neck, which terminated in a rough wooden handle. For a moment I marvelled what it could be, but I was not to be left long in ignorance of its use.

"When these are warmed up to a white heat," said Sir Thomas, with an evil grin, "I have no doubt they are a sure seal for eyes that see what they should not see. I am much beholden to you, Master Bassett, for the loan of these dainty toys."

I guessed at once what the spur-shaped instrument was used for, and my blood ran cold.

"No doubt, no doubt, Sir Thomas," said the other nervously, "but are you satisfied that such measures shall secure our own safety? Why not ensure silence by more certain means?"

"Because," answered his companion, baring his teeth like an angry wolf, "I hate the cur for many reasons, and mean to pay him in full for being the cause of my humiliation before all the churls and grooms of King's Guard. This punishment is a living death, and is quite as secure as the grave; for, take light and speech from man, and what is he but a dead corpse? As to the rest, have I not told you a dozen times that at daybreak I shall have two hundred of the starkest bowmen in the West Countrie within King's Guard—men who will fight to the death against the King himself, for the very sufficient reason that when they walk abroad all and each have their necks festooned with noosed ropes?"

"I know—I know," mumbled Master Bassett, twisting his hands and shuffling his feet uneasily. "But the King—the King! Men say the King is in such straits at present——"

"That he will all the more surely keep Alured safe," replied Sir Thomas, taking up a worn leather apron of Hal's and slowly rubbing the night dew off his armour.

"I tell thee, Bassett, there is no cause for either of us to fear his return, inasmuch as he hath run his bull neck so close to the block that Edward himself cannot save him now, even if he would."

All this conversation was so far a deep and mysterious riddle to me. However, the next question of Bassett, and the answer which satisfied it, revealed the drift of their intentions.

"What of your cousin Hubert?" pursued Bassett, his eyes glistening with the lust of avarice but his forehead covered with the sweat of fear. "He is not one to relinquish his patrimony without a struggle—besides there are his vassals and others to be reckoned with. Ha! Sir Thomas, ha!"

Sir Thomas laughed, walked to the door, and whistled once or twice into the night. In a minute or two Wilmer, with the cicatrice of his late wound showing up raw red in the feeble lamp-light, slunk into the smithy and stood sullen and silent before the two.

"My good friend," said Sir Thomas quietly, "can you keep a secret?"

"You know I can, my Lord, no one better than yourself," replied the other gruffly.

"Especially when a whisper of it would tighten a cord about your halse bone," remarked Sir Thomas coolly, "and the keeping of it means a helmetful of silver pieces."

"I warrant, your honour," replied the ruffian with a grin.

"Mark you, Master Bassett," said the Seneschal pleasantly, "what a trusty agent I hold in my employ. Now, Wilmer, tell Master Bassett what work I have entrusted to your hands for this night."

Wilmer looked irresolutely from his master to Bassett, but the Knight made an impatient gesture and



the fellow coloured, bit a mouthful of his beard, spat sullenly on the ground and lowered his eyes.

"At the stroke of twelve to-night," said he, in a husky voice, whilst the colour faded out of his cheeks as he spoke, "at the stroke of twelve, as soon as the second watch is posted at the gate I am to make my way to young Lord Hubert's chamber and drive a whinger into his heart as he lies in bed——"

"And in that way pay off the score you owe him for the whipping he ordered you a month since," remarked Sir Thomas drily. "Proceed, good fellow."

"I shall then raise an alarm and have young Engledew seized as the murderer, which will appear the more likely inasmuch as Lord Hubert flogged him to-day with his riding switch, and I shall moreover use his whinger to do the business. As soon as Engledew is bound and gagged he is to be handed over to me here, and when I have finished with him (here he straightened himself up and pointed to the spur-shaped tool and the two knives beside the lamp) I warrant, your honours, that his tongue will never wag of aught or his eyes see again what his betters would wish him ignorant of."

A dead silence among the three wretches followed and this interval increased the strained agony of my mind. My heart seemed turned into water, my head spun round and the sweat dripped from my hands and face like rain. I tried to pray inwardly, but I seemed to be bereft of the faculty of thinking and I could do nothing but stare wildly at the anvil where the horrid spur-shaped tool, the dumpy knives and the flickering lamp appeared to float up and down and around as if in some unhallowed witch-dance.

Bassett was the first to speak, and I felt almost grateful to him for breaking the death-like silence.

"A good plan—an excellent plot, i' faith," said he, wiping the sweat from his white, unwholesome face. "An excellent plot—that is—I mean if it do not miscarry. Jesu Maria! What was that?"

A bat on the oak beam over my head had squeaked and dropped down almost before my face. I would have cried aloud on the name of God if I could have found my voice, for I surely thought my time had come, but my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth. The obscene creature whickered sideways across the smithy towards mine enemies, then onwards, then back again towards me, and finally out through the door into the night.

Sir Thomas laughed contemptuously and clapped the Sheriff on the shoulder, at the same time railing him upon his white face. But Bassett, who appeared to be the least hardy of the murderous three, shook his head, crossed himself, and muttered something indistinctly.

"Come, Master Bassett," said Sir Thomas with a touch of scorn. "Come! I thought you were made of harder metal than this. Tut! tut! man, you are shaking like a thief under the gallows. Come to my chamber and drain down a cup of French wine and I warrant you will look upon work with a stouter heart. Follow us with the lamp, Wilmer."

And then the three passed out of the armourer's shop into the night, and left me alone in the dark.

## CHAPTER VI

**M**Y first impulse, when I was sure they had gone out of sight and hearing, was to fall upon my knees and thank God heartily for the mercy whereby I had been enabled to overhear their plot. My next was to rush straight to my young Lord, disclose all to him and alarm the garrison, but, on considering the overpowering forces that Sir Thomas had at his disposal, I recognised the hopelessness of attempting to meet force with force, and decided that instant flight was the only hope for us both.

I was fully aware that we could only leave the Castle by way of the ramparts, as free passage through the gate was out of the question. Accordingly I commenced to grope about in the dark for a rope which I had observed in the smithy a few days before, and in my search accidentally laid my hand upon the anvil and its heap of ghastly tools.

The contact with the horrid spur-shaped instrument of devildom gave me such a shock that I involuntarily uttered a low cry, and after waiting some few minutes in great fear that it might have been overheard, I felt sufficiently reassured to continue my search, and presently came upon the coil of rope that I had been seeking.



The single embrasure which admitted light into Hal Panton's workshop was little overlooked by the sentinels, on account of the great height of the walls at this point of the fortifications, and as the opening was just large enough to permit the passage of a man's body, I deemed it the best place whereat to essay our escape.

There was a small iron bar across it, and my first business was to remove this obstacle. I dared not waste time in searching in the dark for suitable tools to effect my purpose, so I took up the first my hand touched, which happened to be a short iron crow, and setting to work in feverish haste, succeeded in forcing the bar out of its sockets after an hour or two of incredible exertions.

Just as I laid the twisted bar down softly at my feet, I heard the bell at the barbican boom nine times and presently I heard the clatter of arms as the first night watch were changed at the gate.

We had just three hours before us, but such as it was the time appeared but a short start in our race for life. I crossed the court, slinking along by the shadows like a thief, and crept upstairs with a throbbing heart to my own chamber in the eastern turret. I snapped out a light with my flint and steel, and not daring to use a taper kept the flickering tinder burning only long enough to find my cloak and sword, and then made my way stealthily to my Lord's room, where I found him, to my intense surprise, dressed and sitting up with a taper burning beside him.

Now Lord Hubert, up to that period of his life, had never displayed any special love for either reading or the exercise of arms, so I was the more surprised to observe a drawn sword lying on his table and a small illuminated copy of the Holy Writings in his hand.

He stared slightly at my entrance, and fixing a stern,

interrogative look upon me, asked me harshly what brought me there at that hour.

"My Lord," I said in a low voice that choked with the consciousness of my tidings, "I have come to tell you that the villain Wilmer aims at your life this very moment."

"Dolt," said he testily, "have you disturbed me on that account? Go back to your bed, fool, inasmuch as I know all you have come to tell me already."

I was utterly dumb-stricken with his calmness for a moment or two, but I presently recovered my voice and ventured to ask him how he had learned Wilmer's intentions.

"I observed the evil-faced cutpurse prowling about my chamber when he deemed me absent during the last few days," he answered coolly, "and as I was curious to know what he wanted, I concealed myself behind the arras whilst I was supposed to be at supper this evening. He came stealing into my room presently and by the fashion whereby he marked the position of my bed and the disposition of the furniture, betrayed his purpose even if he had not bared his knife and stricken down once or twice at my pillow as though it were a pleasure for him to stab even that. I believe that the ruffian must have been rummaging through my essences and French sweetmeats during my absence to-day, inasmuch as they are all disturbed. However, if he purposes visiting me to-night I shall kill him like a dog, and if he waits until to-morrow I warrant he shall never lift a knife again, inasmuch as I will have his hands chopped off at the wrists in the morning for venturing to lay his foul fingers upon my sugared cherries."

I could not but marvel at the courage wherewith he regarded the menaces to his life and his childish annoy-

ance about his disturbed store of stinking essences and vile French trash ; however, I saw that he was as yet but imperfectly acquainted with his danger, and I proceeded to undeceive him immediately.

"Unless you come with me, my Lord, and that, too, quickly," I said curtly and resolutely, "you shall be beyond the needs of rose-water and sugared cherries in the place where you shall abide to-morrow night." And then I told him briefly all I had heard in the smithy.

He showed neither fear nor disbelief of my tale, only a helpless fury which was pitiable to witness, when one considered what he was and how he was situated.

"What?" he cried, almost weeping with rage. "Does my oily cousin aim not only at my life but also at the lands of my father? I will to the traitor this moment and cut out his heart."

He seized his sword and stamped about the room in a frenzy of impotent hatred, vowing that he would call out the garrison—alas ! poor youth, there were scarcely a dozen among them who would have drawn swords on his behalf—and then, to my great horror, he rushed to the window and flung it open as though to call to the guard below, which proceeding, I knew well, would but hasten our deaths.

As he swung back the casement, the sound of the sentinel striking the bell at the gate came up to us like a death knell.

"If we sit down here quietly and wait for our murderers we shall have two more hours to live, my Lord," I said to him in a low voice, "but we shall not have five minutes to say our prayers if you call them now. I prithee, my Lord, listen to my counter-plot first. If you approve of it, place yourself under my guidance and I will ensure you at least your life and

liberty ; if you do not care to follow my counsel, then will I do what seems best to yourself, even if it is to abide with you here to the end."

He instantly became calm and listened patiently enough while I unfolded my plan, and when I had finished agreed to place himself in my hands on one proud condition—namely, that I should leave him to go his own way as soon as we were clear of King's Guard. We then stole down the turret stairs like cats to the armourer's shop, where I made fast the rope to the great oak beam whereon Hal Panton was wont to try the edge of new-ground blades, and cautiously lowered the other end to the ground.

I then told Lord Hubert, curtly enough, that I would descend first, for the double purpose of ascertaining if all was clear below and securing a couple of horses if possible. I spoke resolutely and with the tone of one who did not mean to be gainsaid, for both our lives depended on prompt and active measures ; and I had so little confidence in my young master's prudence and horsemanship, that I was determined to see to this business myself. It was too dark to see his face, but I had little doubt that this assumption of authority over him was galling to his haughty nature. I heard him draw his breath through his teeth hard ; however, he made no comment on my blunt speech, and he even assisted me through the window and helped to brace out the rope while I slipped down.

The moment I reached the ground I observed three horses feeding close to the fosse. I immediately pulled thrice upon the rope, which was the signal previously agreed upon between us that my companion was to descend, and then walked softly up to the horses and caught two of them by their forelocks. They plunged violently and shook me about greatly, but I held on

desperately, as I knew that our lives depended on them ; and presently Lord Hubert descended, and aided me in securing them.

I then cut a sufficient length from the rope to make a pair of halters, and having bridled each of the horses with a half hitch round the lower jaw, I helped Lord Hubert up on his animal, and then mounted my own.

For a moment or two we sat silent and moveless, and then I made one last bid for my young master's love.

"My Lord," I said softly, "I prithee that you will change your mind about our parting forthwith. If you will take me with you, I will follow you to the ends of the earth, and die, if needs be, in your service."

"You struck me to-day," said Lord Hubert in a low voice. "You, the son of a base tiller of the soil, struck me, your lawful Lord."

"I did, my Lord," I said slowly, "and I am sorry that you drove me to such extremities ; but I should do so again if you laid the same indignity on me."

He sat up very straight on his horse's back, but I could see his figure was trembling with anger against the skyline.

"We part now, my Lord, perhaps for ever," I continued ; "but ere we part, let me tell you one fact, whose verity you may learn hereafter in a rougher fashion from others, who will care nothing for your rank or lineage. Learn now, my Lord—or learn later on, if you list—that a free-born Englishman, standing on the land that his fathers and himself have helped to make free, will give back buffet for buffet, even to a King."

"Base peasant !" said Lord Hubert between his clenched teeth. "If ever I lay hands upon you when I come back to mine own again, I promise you that

your back shall smart for the words your tongue hath uttered."

"A poor return, methinks, for having given you your life to-night," said I coldly. "Farewell, my Lord, and may Heaven send you more sense and better manners."

He turned his horse and rode off with a scornful laugh along the high-road ; but I, deeming the forest way was a safer course than the beaten track, turned towards the north, and pricked on into the friendly shelter of the greenwood. After riding five or six miles I came to a wooded knoll, from whence, I was well aware, I could view King's Guard by daylight on its great swelling hill. On this vantage-ground I dismounted and waited for morning, resolved to watch the Castle and observe, in case of pursuit, what direction Sir Thomas would send forth his horsemen, who would thus give me a hint what road to take myself.

I had not been there more than an hour or two, when the sudden booming of the great alarum-bell of King's Guard told me that our flight had been discovered. I watched and peered and prayed for morning, and when the first faint light that precedes sunrise appeared I hailed it with joy, although it showed me a small party of Sir Thomas Siaward's men prowling about in the wood on my right.

However, I had a good sword at my side, a good horse under me, and God's blessed light to see my enemies by, and my courage rose briskly within me once more. I stole away softly through the forest, unobserved by my enemies, turned to the south and then to the east, and reached that part of the forest that skirted Torre Abbey before sunrise.

The solemn sound of the Abbey bell tolling for matins through the quiet woods immediately put the idea into my head of going to the monks and

craving food and sanctuary from my pursuers. As I made my way through the bracken and underbrush, now starting a woodcock, now raising a fallow deer, and listening to the measured stroke of the Abbey bell, I was minded of my former speech to Prior Edmund on that day when I had confessed my dislike to a life of letters and prayer.

"Happier lying in the greenwood like a wild thing than sitting in the Abbot's stall in Torre Abbey."

Well, I had more than my wish. I was soaked through and through with night dew, my clothing was rent to shreds with brambles; I was faint and famishing, and bloody-minded men were following on my track more keenly than ever foresters followed a deer-slot. Therefore when I contrasted my own wretchedness with the holy peace which seemed to be laid like a spell not only on the Abbey, but the woods and the very air around it, I felt that my sufferings and misfortunes were laid upon me by Heaven as a punishment for my waywardness.

"I have been wrong! I have been wrong!" I cried aloud. "There is no happiness in the world after all, and I shall go back to the Abbey like the prodigal son in the Holy Writings, and beg the Prior to take me back."

I tethered my horse at the porter's lodge and crept into the chapel, where I leaned up against a pillow and listened with down-bowed head to the well-remembered office that the monks were wont to chant at that hour. Presently the service ended, and they came filing past me two and two. As they went by, I sorrowfully remarked what little change two years had made in their several countenances, inasmuch as they all looked as if Time had passed them by, whilst it had been so busy and bloody in the outer world.

"Verily, verily," I thought, "this monkish life, spent

apart from the cruelty, greed, and bloodshed of the outside world, is the only truly happy one beneath the stars."

Last of all came Prior Edmund, his eyes upon the ground, his arms crossed, and his hands thrust up his loose woollen sleeves. I ventured to stretch out my hand as he passed and laid it upon his robe, whereupon he halted, and started upon recognising me.

"What!" said he. "My one-time little scholar?"

His pale, ascetic face, snowy hair, and the white biretta and robes he wore gave him so venerable an appearance that he looked like the apparition of some holy saint, and I dropped down upon my knees and asked his blessing in a trembling voice.

"*Benedicite!*" said he gently; and I felt that I would rather have heard those words from his lips than from the Pope himself. "Heaven bless you, my boy, and not only show you the way to go, but also give you the grace to keep it during these days of wickedness and danger."

He then asked what brought me so far from King's Guard, and in as few words as possible I related all the circumstances connected with the flight of Lord Hubert and myself. As I progressed with my tale, a great sorrow appeared to overwhelm him, for he sat down upon a stone bench and covered his face with his robe, and when I finished he remained a long while without uttering a word.

I strove to cheer him by reminding him of young Lord Hubert's safety, and that it would be impossible for Sir Thomas to hold King's Guard for any time against the powers that the rightful owners could bring against it.

"Be of good cheer, father," I said; "be of good cheer. What poor advantages the traitor possesses now shall crumble away at the blast of the Briwere Mot.



Why, I warrant that the very gates will open of their own accord at the summons of their lawful master, and Sir Thomas himself will fly at the first glimpse of Lord Alured's banners advancing to claim their own again."

"Alas ! Guy," said the Prior sadly, "you have not yet learned the worst. 'Tis some days since I heard a report concerning your noble master, but I indeed placed no reliance in its truth until your tale came to place it beyond all question. Alas for the noble house to whose generosity the very walls of this holy building owe their origin ! Alas for its master, now in deadly peril ! Alas for its haughty heir—a landless, hunted creature ! Thus passeth the splendours of the world !"

"Father ! father !" I cried, in much vague dread of what I was yet so desirous to know. "I beseech you do not speak to me in parables—I prithee tell me the worst at once."

He bade me follow him, and then led me into the Lady Chapel, where, by the light of the perpetual lamp which swung from the groined arch overhead, I observed a steel gauntlet on the altar beneath which Dame Rosamond Briwere had been laid to rest nine years before.

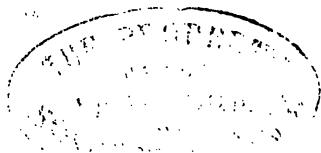
I recognised the gauntlet at once, for I myself had reset a rivet in the articulations of it, and I would have known my own work among the armour of a division. I turned to the Prior and looked piteously at him for an explanation—for, next to my father's, Lord Briwere's person was the dearest concern of my life at that time.

"It is just four weeks," said the Prior, "since he marched with his powers by the Abbey in an easterly direction. He rode up alone, left his horse with one of the lay brothers, and came to me to be shriven in this very spot. When he rose from his knees he laid his gauntlet on the altar, and bade me mark that he left it as a gage to Heaven that the work he had undertaken

was not for greed or gain, but was solely for his own rights and the good of his country. He then told me that if he returned within seven days he would redeem his gage by a ransom worthy of a prince, and if he failed to make good his promise that I was to sing a daily mass for the soul of Alured Briwere, who had fallen under his shield ; and so he rode away. And now comes the part of my story which makes me fear the worst. A week back, one of those idle vagrants who trade on the name of religion under the guise of a pilgrim's habit and scallop-shell, came to the Abbey and craved alms and lodging. His request was freely granted, for, as you know full well, Guy, we White Canons, notwithstanding our acquaintance with humanity (being most of us men who have mingled freely with our fellow-men ere we took the cowl), nevertheless make no distinction between the worthy and the unworthy what time they crave for alms.

"Well, boy, when this knavish wanderer was fed, he opened his mouth and let his tongue wag at such a rate that I was almost deafened, and presently he related, among many other wondrous things, that he had been present at a great battle fought outside Winchester between the King's troops and those of my Lord Briwere.

"I deemed the man a liar (or at least a partial impostor), and so thought little of his tale at the time, for he had previously spoken of his travels in the Holy Lands in such a fashion as made me suspect his veracity, and when I had questioned him closely about Palestine (in which land I myself had served as a soldier against the Infidel), I had been convinced that he had never been further east than Paris. Wherefore, Guy, I dismissed his tale of Lord Alured and the fate that had overtaken him as an idle fabrication, but, alas ! I see too



plainly now that the fellow spoke nothing but the truth."

"Is my Lord, then, dead?" I asked faintly.

The Prior shook his head negatively, but there was little hope in the melancholy gesture of his white crown.

"Wounded and a prisoner?" I demanded, with a heightened colour and a throbbing heart.

"Aye, boy," murmured the Prior, turning away his face. "Wounded and a prisoner in London Tower, and the axe even now sharpened for his noble head—unless—unless it hath already fallen."

"Wounded, and a prisoner in London Tower," I repeated, thinking of the resolve I had made not half an hour before of taking on me the white cowl. "Wounded, and a prisoner in London."

I stood looking stupidly at the perpetual lamp, and turning over the Prior's words in my dull brain.

"Wounded, and a prisoner in London Tower," I murmured again. "Is there no hope for him, then—no mercy in the King's heart—no chance of pardon?"

"I fear not, my poor Guy," answered the Prior in a low voice. "His crime is treason, and its penalty is—the block. The only way you can now serve your noble master is by your prayers."

"Not whilst he is living," I cried passionately, for the affection for my benefactor had by this time driven all the selfish longing for a peaceful, lazy life out of my mind. "No, father, my place is with him in his prison. If he is wounded and a prisoner he hath the more need of me, and I will to horse at once and ride to London. A great lord or an knight might well be refused admittance to his presence, but the very lowliness of my position shall surely obtain for me that access which would be denied to others."

"God bless you, my boy, for those words," cried the

Prior, putting his arms affectionately around me. "Yes, Guy, yes, there are other ways of serving Heaven than on one's knees. Come to my cell, boy, and after you have rested and eaten somewhat then turn your face to London town with what speed you may."

A lay brother brought me some food and wine, which were very welcome, inasmuch as I had not broken my fast for thirty hours, and, whilst I ate and drank, Prior Edmund and the brother withdrew and left me to myself. In about an hour's time the lay brother returned with a plain suit of hoddien grey and a pair of untanned riding boots, which I very thankfully exchanged for my own torn velvet frippery, and as soon as I had dressed myself in my new garments he brought me to Father Edmund, who conducted me in turn to the courtyard, where I found a good horse, saddled and bridled, already awaiting me.

The Prior embraced me warmly, laid his hand upon my bared head in blessing, and then gave me two packets, one of which was superscribed for the hands of Lord d'Mohun, and the other for myself. I sprang into the saddle, waved my cap in farewell to the Prior, spurred out under the arch, which bore in relief on the keystone a shield with two bends undy, the badge of my Lord Alured, whose pious ancestors had founded the Abbey of Torre, and then set forward on my journey to London town.

I took the high-road to Exeter, in which town I arrived an hour after nightfall, and took up my inn for the nonce in a tavern hard by the Cathedral. Here I opened the packet addressed to myself. It was a letter from Prior Edmund wherein he informed me that he had recommended me to the care of Lord d'Mohun, who, he had little doubt, would be able to secure me access to my master. His letter, which contained much

matter o' fact and kindly advice anent the pitfalls of London town, ended with an affectionate benediction on myself and my mission, and enclosed fifty golden crowns, which was a sum far in excess of my simple needs.

In the morning I resumed my journey, and pushed on as far as the Dorset hills, where I passed the night in a forest-warden's hut. On the evening of the third day I came to Southampton, and there I tarried a day or two to refresh my horse so that I might put him to his best paces in covering the remainder of the journey.

My next halting place was Guildford, where I lay at the Bell Inn, and the next day, long before the first lark had shaken the night dew from her back preparatory to her musical climb into the dusky grey heavens, I was in the saddle and well on my way on my last stage to London town.

## CHAPTER VII

**I**T was a beautiful spring afternoon when I reached the great river at a point close to the Palace of Lambeth.

I crossed over in the ferry-boat, towing my horse astern by the headstall, and on landing at the northern bank rubbed him down with a handful of grass and waited a couple of hours ere I re-saddled for, indeed, the poor beast was almost sped with fatigue. Then I remounted and rode slowly on towards the distant spires and towers of London town which shone as red in the afternoon sun as if they had been lately under a rain of blood.

I rode by the City and Abbey of Westminster at a walk, staring at them with my chin on my shoulder, and my eyes distended with admiration. Though compelled to pass them by a great circuit in order to avoid fording a swift mill-stream which flowed into the Thames between them and me, I could not but feel awe-stricken even by that distant view of the great minster and the gilt-roofed palace. The one was so stately and venerable, the other so airy and graceful, and the remaining buildings that clustered round the two were so beautiful that the whole scene appeared to my country eyes to be rather the work of the pixies than the labour of mortal hands.

I passed on, and trotted forward over the marshy ground beyond Westminster, and then did it seem to me as if new wonders were rising up within the turrets of London as each stride of my horse brought me nearer the walls.

As I rode on with gaping eyes and mouth, I was suddenly startled by hearing a woman's voice scream twice, "*A moi ! sieur, à moi !*" and, glancing over my left shoulder, perceived two ladies on horseback, one in the full bloom of maturity, the other of that age whereat childhood and womanhood intermingle, being roughly handled by a pair of ragged churls. One of the ruffians, mounted on an ill-kempt horse, was endeavouring to pull a necklet of gold beads from the throat of the girl whose scream had attracted my attention, the other on foot with his horse's bridle over his arm and had hold of the elder lady's purse, and was cutting the straps it hung by with his dagger.

I instantly drew my sword, and spurring my failing horse directly at him who was tugging at the necklet, dealt him a cut over the head with all my strength.

The blow was true enough, and hard enough to have split his skull in twain if he had had no other guard to his head than his greasy felt cap, but my sword edge bit on some harder material than human bone, and turning aside sheared half his cap away, and so disclosed four strips of iron plate arranged crosswise over his matted hair. However, the shock of my blow alone must have sadly discomposed him, for he instantly released the necklet and, without attempting to draw his weapon, spurred off at such a mad gallop as showed me the hopelessness of overtaking him with my tired animal.

In the meanwhile, however, the other robber had obtained possession of his booty, and was already far

away before I could devote my attentions to him, and as I could do nothing towards restoring the purse or punishing the robbers, I accordingly turned my attention to the ladies.

They were very beautiful, each in her own fashion, although there was a great difference between their ages, and one was dark as night, and the other as fair as a cornflower.

The elder lady was about thirty. She was slight and tall with most wonderful dark eyes, and a very nervous little mouth that seemed to breath nothing but tenderness and sympathy. Her dress was a plain riding robe of dark green, and there was little about it to indicate that the wearer was of higher rank than the ordinary, but I observed that the jewel worn at her throat was one of value, and that her great coil of blue-black hair was netted up in a gold and velvet fillet.

Her companion was about sixteen, as fair as the other was dark, as much under the average height of woman as the dark lady was over, and yet she appeared to me to be the loveliest creature I had ever seen in my life. Her eyes were a deep violet colour, and her complexion so fair that one would have thought she had never bathed in aught but cream since her birth. Her hair, cropped all over her well-shaped head in soft, thick curls, seemed like a frame of burnished copper set about her sweet, flushed little face, and her recent alarm, which had caused her to breathe quickly and tremulously, had parted her ripe mouth and set her small, white teeth in such a pretty fashion that her mouth looked like a shrinking red rosebud wherein some flakes of snow had lodged. She was dressed similarly to her companion, except that she wore a little close-fitting blue cap instead of a wimple on her curly head, and her right hand was covered with a hawking

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gauntlet whereon a hooded falcon strained and tugged violently at his jesses.

I assumed that they were mother and daughter, who had come out on the marshes to give their falcon a stoop at a stray pigeon, and was at some loss to account for the contrast between their simple dresses and the excellent horses they affected, but deemed them to be the wife and daughter of some rich merchant to whom good horseflesh was of more concern than gaudy clothes.

I dismounted from my own worn-out beast, and, doffing my cap, approached the dark lady and asked her if she had received any hurt or had lost much when the robber took her purse.

"None," said she, smiling, and speaking in a pretty French accent. "None, I thank you, my brave boy ; none, I thank you, beyond the loss of my good falcon which flew away in the *mêlée*. My purse ? Ah, the robber shall find nothing in it. No ; nothing but some stale comfits and a package of embroidering needles. But you, Alys, my child, have you not been half strangled by that bearded villain ?"

I turned to the young lady and expressed an anxious hope that she had not fared worse at the robber's hands than the lady, her mother.

"I assure your——" she commenced and then stopped dead, with her beautiful violet eyes directed with a look of surprise and inquiry not at me, but straight over my head, whereupon I glanced back quickly and observed that the tall, dark lady, with one forefinger on her red lips, was making little becks and nods over my head.

When she perceived that I had detected her, the dark lady burst into a fit of merry laughter that seemed to me like the chiming of the silver bells which the acolytes

ring in the chapel of Torre Abbey, and then the young lady also commenced to laugh as musically as her companion.

The two women laughed so long and heartily that I caught the infection of their merriment, although I was at a loss to understand the source of their amusement, and presently I joined in too like a rustic at a fair, and we three laughed together for a long minute before we stopped.

"No, my brave boy," said the dark lady, shaking her head and speaking in her pretty French fashion, "the maiden is not my daughter, but I take some pride in being her Aunt Joan. Yes, yes, her Aunt Joan," and here she went off in another peal of laughter, wherein I joined too, but less heartily than before, inasmuch as I was becoming uncomfortably conscious that the dark lady was laughing at myself.

"But," said she, suddenly becoming grave, "I have not thanked you yet for your brave help which saved us both from so great a danger. Such service should not go unrewarded ; but, alas !——" she turned away from me suddenly, and said to her companion in French, "Alys, my child, have you no gold pieces in your purse ? *Hélas !* then we are beggars indeed, and must needs say goodbye to our preserver without giving him more than our thanks, unless, dear heart, you will offer him a kiss in payment—and in good sooth, Alys, he is a pretty boy, with his golden hair and his fair, fresh, blushing face. Yes ; is he not ?"

The young lady laughed, and answered in French that she would as lief kiss me as any of the velvet-clad gallants of the Court, as she was sure that I was as proper a man as any of them.

All this while I stood blushing hotly and wondering how I might turn this raillery upon my unconscious

tormentors, and after a pause I summoned up my hardihood and made shift to say—

"Pardon me, ladies, but I ought to let you know that I am acquainted with the French tongue, and it is not, therefore, my fault that I have overheard your proposed reward. I gladly accept the courtesy so freely offered, and I hope you will not think it ill of me if I say that I will value a kiss from Mistress Alys far above any sum of money you might offer."

"What?" cried the dark lady. "Have we found a courtier as well as a knight errant in these dreary marshes. You speak as bravely as you fight, young sir, notwithstanding your hodden jerkin. Come, Alys, you are fairly trapped, and as he hath taken you at your word, you must e'en give the youth his well-earned guerdon, and so let us be gone."

The girl blushed far more hotly than I had done a few minutes since; however, she uttered no protest, and bending down from her saddle without the slightest hesitation, she kissed me on the mouth to my intense astonishment, whereupon her aunt laughed as long and musically as she had done some while before.

"Come," she said, "if the niece has paid her share in the reckoning it is but fair that the aunt should pay her moiety."

And then she unfastened the great sapphire at her throat and placed it in my unwilling hands. It was, as I have already mentioned, a jewel of great price and beauty. I have it to this day, having borne it, either in my cap or helmet, for forty years through many a bloody fight and many a hard stress of fortune without parting with it, and yet I have always set more value on that kiss, which was offered me so frankly and so simply, than on the costly Indian gem.

"And now, hark you, gentle champion of distressed

damosels," said the dark lady. "If we should chance to meet again do not say aught of this encounter, inasmuch as my husband—Master—Master John Brown, merchant and tapster of the City of London, would be grievously displeased to learn of these hawking parties of his dame and niece. Therefore, remember discretion and silence, and so God give you good den and good fortune. Come, good niece."

And with another merry laugh Dame Joan Brown waved her glove to me and set off at a gallop, accompanied by her companion.

I watched them ride across the marsh, with my heart full of a sweet content, until their figures faded away into the evening mists. Then I put the jewel of Dame Brown into my purse, mounted my weary horse, and thoughtfully resumed my journey to the City. I entered at the Lud Gate, and made my way through the streets, which appeared to be never ending. The multitude of foot passengers and horsemen I encountered confused me greatly, and I found myself an object of the bitter scorn of both. At the time I attributed their scathing remarks to the miry state of my appointments and the country cut of my garments, and thought what heartless folk these Londoners must be that they should so jeer at a poor stranger. However, I remember very well now that I rode awkwardly in the middle of the street on that occasion, and so got in the way of nearly every second person I encountered.

It was with a thankful heart that I at length came on an inn by the river in Thames Street—it was, if I recollect aright, the Rose Tavern—and here I obtained a chamber for myself and a much-needed stable for my horse. Immediately after supper I retired to bed, and, utterly worn out with my journey, but in a happier frame of mind than I had known for many a long day, I laid

myself down, and was sound asleep almost as soon as my head rolled back on the pillow.

All night long the dark eyes and stately head of merry Dame Brown and the winsome, flower-like face of her niece haunted my dreams. They seemed to float out of the night sometimes together, sometimes one by one, but ever smiling and holding out their hands ; but when I would stretch out mine in response, they would fade away, only to reappear and float before me, smiling and beckoning me across meadows that were covered with the most beautiful flowers.

I was roused from these dreams by hearing my host bawling into my ears—

“Up, up, young sir, the bell of Saint Paul’s hath just knolled ten, and you said last night that you wanted to be afoot at sunrise. Pardee ! Either your journey was long or your dreams were pleasant, inasmuch as when I roused you at six I had much ado to loose my hand from you, and then you mumbled that you would follow me to the end of the earth, and so turned round and fell asleep again.”

I sprang out of bed instantly, and blushing crimson at the thought that my heart’s secrets were so patent to strangers, hastily bathed my face and hands and donned my clothes. I descended to the guest-chamber of the inn, and broke my fast on a great piece of manchet bread and a plate of spiced beef ; and then, bidding my host see to my horse in my absence, took my cloak and cap and set forth to find the Tower.

Before I had gone far I completely lost my way in the narrow streets that seemed to me like the cells of some vast honeycomb, amid which the busy multitude went in and out like bees ; and it was not long before my head grew dizzy and my senses confused with the varying figures that swarmed around me on every side.

There were serious citizens in sober-hued garments of fine broadcloth, brown-faced archers in steel caps and quilted jackets, gaily dressed city dames, all silk and musk, tarry sailors in rough falding petticoats and long sea-boots, courtly gallants in silk hose and furred jerkins, pages, watermen, beggars, lords, pastors, vintners, saints and sinners, all passing one another to and fro, and entering or issuing out of the high wooden-framed houses, whose upper stories almost met overhead in the form of an arch.

All—all appeared to be busy either with the concerns of business or pleasure. There were no loiterers amongst the hurrying crowd that passed around me in every direction, and left me standing in my rustic, mud-stained garments, the only drone in that vast, busy hive ; and gradually my head began to swim and my understanding became obscured as I commenced to realise the greatness of London town.

Two lurching seamen jostled me to one side. I turned to look at them angrily, but in doing so got in the way of an apprentice, bearing a great war-saddle on his shoulder, who pushed me roughly from him, and, in stepping back to give him room, I was almost trodden down by the charger of a mounted knight, who cursed me heartily for an addle-pated loon. Fearing that my country speech would meet with ridicule, I shrank from addressing myself to any of those I met, and thus too shy to ask my way to the Tower, wandered about like a stray dog until I happened to turn down a side street leading to the river, where I came face to face with my quest.

I knew I could not be mistaken, inasmuch as the grim building itself announced its guardianship over the mighty river and the great town, and awe and dread crept over me by turns as I looked upon its thick walls.

Here and there, either in a projecting bartizan or on the top of a turret, I caught sight of the glitter of a sentinel's pike or steel cap, and at every angle tower I perceived a warder pacing to and fro beside the heaped-up beacon, that only required a tinder spark to send it up into a roaring signal of alarm. A sense of calm, conscious strength seemed to brood upon the heavy battlements. The ancient fortress seemed a living thing fully aware of the great charge entrusted to it, and I felt that the angle towers that stood up on its walls like great, silent guards would have surely cried aloud this challenge if they had tongues—

“Come east, west, north, south! One by one or together. We shall weather ye all!”

As I stood moralising in this foolish vein, six strong horses, drawing a great wagon piled as high as possible with neatly bound sheaves of arrows, came straining up the hill and crossed over the drawbridge. The driver rapped on the barrier, and after some delay the portcullis was raised, the great doors were opened, and the fellow drove his team into the Tower. Before the doors were closed I advanced with a vague hope that I might obtain an entrance along with the wagon, but just as I reached the gate an archer stepped forward, and, presenting his pike at my breast, gruffly ordered me to halt and state my business.

My heart sank within me as I foresaw, for the first time, the difficulty in obtaining access to my Lord; nevertheless, I put on a bold face and demanded to be led forthwith to him.

“Softly, softly, my lad,” said the archer. “Have you the Lieutenant's sealed order?”

I was obliged to confess very reluctantly that I had not.

“Then be off,” said he sternly, “or I shall put a foot of steel into your belly.”

I begged him, by the names of all the saints I could remember, to let me pass, and, in a vain hope that I could bribe him, pulled out the remainder of my fifty crowns and tearfully offered them to him if he would admit me. He looked at them eagerly, for they were more than what two years of his pay were like to be ; but he, nevertheless, shook his head and continued to push me further back with his pike. Finally I held forth one gold piece between my fingers, and said despairingly—

“See, archer, I will give you this if you will tell me whether Lord Alured Briwere, Baron of King's Guard in Devon, is a prisoner here or not.”

The man glanced cautiously about him first, and then nodded briefly, so I put the gold piece in his hand.

“Tell me, good sir,” I said eagerly, “is he within the Tower?”

“Good sir,” said he, with a grin, “I am sorry for your sake, inasmuch as ye seem to be in such a coil about him ; but I do not know aught concerning the gentleman you seem so anxious to join within.”

And then he slammed the great door in my face, and I could hear him laugh heartily as he shot the great bolts and spars within.



## CHAPTER VIII

**W**ITH a very wretched and hopeless feeling in my heart I turned away from the Tower gate and wandered aimlessly about the city.

By and by I found myself in that street which I have since learned is cleped Cheapside, peeping idly into the ground-floor rooms wherein the merchants and their apprentices displayed their wares or chattered with their customers in the street through the open windows.

An armourer's shop, with half its store of shining goods displayed upon the door-posts, attracted my attention and diverted my mind for the nonce from its train of gloomy thought. I immediately stopped before the wide, shutterless windows, and looking into the shop perceived a cheerful-looking, bare-armed young fellow of about my own age in a leathern apron hard at work at a bench that faced the street.

He was engaged in rivetting the lames of a sollert, and he whistled blithely as his little snub-nosed hammer clicked merrily on the iron as if in harmony to the tune. The air was a familiar one—indeed, it was an old West Countrie ballad—and somehow it drew my heart to the young apprentice, as though I had encountered a dear kinsman in the great, friendless, heartless city.

As I lingered close by with a great yearning to address him he suddenly ceased his hammering and whistling and, holding forth the sollert at arm's length as if to criticise his work, chanted in a strong Devonshire turn of voice—

"Then out spake good King Estmere  
And answered him hastilee——"

"Good morrow, friend," I ventured to remark, awkwardly enough, "that is a fair piece of smith-craft in your hand."

"Good morrow, Master Clayfoot," said he, with one quick glance at my splashed riding-boots, rusty spurs, and travel-stained hose. "It is a fair piece of work, as you very justly say, and it should be too, inasmuch as it is mine own craftsmanship."

Then he bent over his bench again without taking further notice of me and resumed his rivetting and song—

"I know no ladye in the land  
That's fit to mate wi' me."

At another time or to another speaker I might have given back as chuff an answer as I had received ; but the tone of his voice and the old song that he sang filled me so full of home thoughts that I had no room in my heart for any feelings of bitterness or anger.

"I crave your pardon, friend," said I very humbly. "I meant no offence, but the ballad you sang and the way you sang it made me think of my own dear land of Devon, and so I ventured to greet you on the chance of your coming from those parts."

"Why, so I do," said he joyously, at the same time laying down his rivetting hammer and standing up. "I

come from the merry town of Exeter. My name is Bevis Mayne, and here is my hand, fellow-countryman."

He rubbed his palm on his leather apron and gripped my hand with such a grasp as only a smith and a West Countryman to boot could have greeted another.

"Forgive my blunt speech a bit ago," said he earnestly, "and put it down to my bad training here rather than to my lack of manners, for there be so many idle wastrels in this great town of rogues that one gets used to a habit of speech which would grate on the ears of our own folk. Come in, come in, fellow-countryman, and sit ye down awhile, for my master is from home, and what work I have to do I can finish blithely whilst ye tell me somewhat of the West Countrie and from what part of it ye come yourself."

So I entered the armourer's shop, and gladly accepting a seat upon an oak chest told him, between the clicks of his hammer, my name, whence I came, and my business in London town. He hammered on whilst I related my story, but when I had finished he laid down his rivetting mall and shook his head very thoughtfully.

"I think, Friend Engledew," said he with a grave look, "that you have but little chance of ever setting eyes on your master if he has taken up his lodging in the Tower of London town. Aye! it is a grim inn that Tower; an inn kept for the great alone and not for simple folk like us, God be thanked, for kings and nobles have taken up their abode there, and that too when the poor souls themselves knew that the lodging was to last them as long as the river ran. Why, Engledew, the very foundations are laid on human bones, and there are more men buried within its walls than are needed to man them. Aye, fay, if your Baron

hath gone to reside there you shall not have the pleasure of meeting him again ere Judgment Day come."

Perceiving that his words affected me he stopped abruptly and handed me a light bassinet, with a request that I would appraise its workmanship. I turned it over in my hands, examining it in a critical fashion, and presently observed that one of the rim rivets was loose. I pointed out this defect to my new friend, whereupon he bade me give him back the helmet, and remarked that he would make it right with a tap or two, but I stretched out my hand for his hammer and begged him to permit me to repair the faulty rivet.

"Why, certes," he replied carelessly, "you are quite welcome to try if you like ; it will probably amuse you, and will not certainly harm the rivet."

He resigned his anvil and vice to me, sat down on his bench, and commenced swinging his legs and whistling "King Estmere."

In the meanwhile I chipped off the inner burr of the loose rivet and knocked it out, selected a rod of soft iron, and, having heated it to the proper colour, fashioned the point into the outer button.

By this time Bevis had stopped whistling and, coming over beside me, watched very attentively how I cut the rivet to its proper length. Whilst I divided the inner end into four parts in the style which old Hal Panton had shown me my new friend displayed great interest, and when I reheated it and placed it through the rim of the helmet, finally setting it in its place by hammering it into a four-rayed star, he broke forth into loud praise, both at the fashion of the rivet and what he was pleased to call the skill wherewith I had wrought it.

"You jested with me, surely," said he, "when you

said a bit ago that you were a page? No, truly? Well, you are not as the pinnicking creatures that go by the name of pages in London."

I laughed and asked him why he should have doubted my degree.

"Pages!" said he scornfully. "Pages are wisht, womanly creatures, with hands as white as milk, which obscenity the mommets pride themselves on, and, what is worse, the vile mincing beasts are so perfumed that they smell like vitches and poison God's air on what side of the street they walk. But you, Engledew, have no musk about you; your hands are brown and strong, and you have just shown me how good a craftsman you are. A page, truly? Well, all I can say, friend, is that the West Countrie breeds pages that are better men than some of the so-called strappers of London town."

To stop his idle chatter I bought an anelace from him for a crown. It was a beautiful weapon about eighteen inches long, with a slender ivory haft, very broad and strong at the hilt, tapering to a very fine point, and ornamented with ribbed fluting that ran half way down the blade. I also gave another crown for a silver-chaped, crimson velvet sheath for it, and very nearly laughed outright at the look of fondness and regret wherewith Bevis parted with his workmanship.

As I took out the money to pay him I brought forth by mistake Dame Joan Brown's sapphire also. I had not mentioned to the apprentice that incident on the marshes that had left such a happy memory in my heart, so I hastily thrust the jewel back into my purse before he caught a glimpse of it, and asked with apparent unconcern if he knew the address of Master Brown, of London. He stared at me and asked which of them I meant.

"Master Brown, merchant," I replied, blushing furiously. "Dame Brown is tall and dark and queenly, and hath a fair niece whose name I do not remember, but methinks it is Alys or some such name."

"Hark to the man," cried Bevis, in a storm of laughter. "Why, there are a round hundred of Browns I wot of in London, and of them there are sixty who are merchants, and of them there are at least ten whose wives be dark to my knowledge, but I know of none whose wives be queenly, or who have fair nieces."

He then pressed me so close, and I blundered so clumsily in trying to baffle his curiosity, that at length I exacted a promise of secrecy from him, and blurted out the whole story, including Dame Brown's warning as to my being silent about her hawking expeditions on the marsh.

Bevis remained silent for a moment, and then asked me shortly to let him see the brooch she had given. I handed it to him, whereupon he examined it carefully and presently returned it without a word.

"Well," said I anxiously, "what do you think of the affair?"

"I think," said he drily, "that you cannot do better than to follow the lady's advice and keep your mouth shut tight. That jewel is one of value, and was never given by a city tapster's dame. Whoever Dame Joan may be she is evidently one of such a rank as I should rede you well not to offend; and, as women of any degree are unchancy cattle to have aught to do with, and those of high station are the most dangerous to frolic with, I shall give you an additional piece of advice which you will do well to follow. Put that jewel in your purse and ward it close, or, better still, sell it, throw it into the river, drop it into the poor-box of

Saint Paul's, but in any case keep it out of sight, and forget as soon as you can that you ever met such a person as Dame Joan Brown or her fair niece."

I thanked Bevis Mayne for his advice, which I perceived was the counsel of one more experienced in the treachery of men than the natural kindliness of women folk. However, I made no attempt to contradict him, nor did I make any promise to follow his rede, but shook hands warmly with him and then betook myself slowly and thoughtfully to the Rose Inn.

## CHAPTER IX

**A**LTHOUGH I was rejoiced to have found one friend at least in this busy city, my joy was somewhat chastened by the ruthless fashion whereby he had dispelled the day-dream that I had unconsciously woven around Dame Joan Brown and her fair, violet-eyed niece. However, I had enough wit to perceive that the advice of Bevis Mayne was not without some good foundation, and I sorrowfully realised my own humble position in the world, and acknowledged to myself that even a city merchant's wife and niece might reasonably look down on such as I. I could not bear to think that Dame Brown occupied a higher rank than she herself had claimed, and yet I could not banish the fear that I might learn at a later time that she was in reality the wife of some rich alderman, who, for aught I knew, might prove a knight, and so discover an immeasurable degree between the worldly stations of the ladies and myself.

Therefore I decided to follow one part of my friend's advice, and made up my mind not to seek further information concerning Dame Brown and her niece ; but I could not bring myself to part with the sapphire, which possessed the magical gift of bringing back the day I received it, along with all its train of sweet recollections.



That night I slept but ill. It was true that now and then the fair flower-like face of Alys peeped out of its halo of burnished hair, and smiled and nodded on me in my dreams. Once or twice Dame Joan Brown herself appeared and beckoned me across the marshes, but the greater part of the night I was haunted by one whom I took to be Master John Brown, a monstrous fat man, dressed in the furred robes of an alderman, who sat on my chest, and threatened me with a great club.

In the morning, when I described to my host how disturbed my dreams had been, and asked him what the vision of a great, fat man sitting on one's chest portended, he sniffed and remarked "Cheese": and I am not yet sure that he was not right after all, inasmuch as I remember that I did eat heartily of it the previous night at supper.

I spent all that day and the four days following in a long but fruitless search through the city for tidings of Lord d'Mohun. Through him alone could I hope to get audience with my dear Lord, and my heart sank within me on the fifth evening, when I returned to the inn after another day spent in hopeless inquiries.

It was a wet, depressing evening, and I was sitting gloomily in the guest-room of the "Rose" awaiting supper, when a big man, enveloped in a riding-cloak of thick falding, and mounted on a powerful grey horse, rode up to the door. The new-comer roared so loudly for the ostler that the very windows shook in their casings, and the host, his dame, the ostlers, and drawers all came running to the door to see what this terrible summons portended, and stood there gazing at him in stupefied astonishment.

The man in the falding cloak then cursed them all with such vigour for keeping a gentleman waiting in the

rain without offering to hold his stirrup, that the entire company, including the host himself, rushed with one accord for his bridle and stirrup, aye, and fought for the honour of holding them as if they were treasures. The burly traveller then dismounted with great dignity and deliberation, and entered the inn, stamping the mud off his long riding-boots and spurs on the clean, sanded floor, and leaving a long wake of rain water behind him from his dripping cloak.

He made his way to the fire-place with such prodigious stamps that every article in the room, including the heavy oak supper table, danced a tremulous jig, and on reaching the hearth turned his back abruptly to the fire, and roared out to the host, who was scarcely three paces from him, to bring a can of hot spiced ale immediately, or he would carve him up into chicken food. The poor host backed hastily out of the guest-chamber, and I was thinking ruefully that I was like to have a very rough and quarrelsome fellow-lodger, when the big man turned very courteously to me, and remarked in an extremely soft and mellow tone of voice that it was an ill night for travellers.

I was so startled by the sudden change in his voice that it was some moments before I could find enough of my own to express agreement with him, and by the time I had stammered out a reply, the landlord came running in with a tankard of hot spiced ale. The traveller pounced on the latter like a hawk on a pie, drained it empty at a single draught, handed it back, and then bellowed out the single word "Supper" in such a terrible voice that the bewildered host turned immediately, and shot out through the door like a swallow.

The burly man then proceeded to toss his wet cloak, cape, hat and jerkin one after the other into different

corners of the room, drew off his long riding-boots, hurled them with great accuracy at an ostler who happened to be skulking outside the door, and vowed that he would clip his ears off if he failed to bring him a pair of dry shoes within a minute.

When the trembling man had rushed off to fulfil this last command, the burly stranger, clad only in his shirt and hose, spread out his feet well apart, and proceeded to warm himself thoroughly before the fire. I suppose that my countenance must have betrayed the uneasiness which at that moment was rife within me, inasmuch as the big man before the fire hemmed once or twice, and then addressed me in his other tone of voice.

"My good youth," said he apologetically, "I hope you do not judge me from the way I address these sons of a heath gallow's tree. There is but one way of obtaining due respect and comfort in one's inn, and that is by letting the host and all his minions know in good round fashion that you have arrived, and, moreover, that you are not of that sort who can be trifled with and put off by a glib use of that sore-ridden word, 'Anon, anon.' Wherefore, my dear young sir, I entreat you not to put me down as one of those breakers of the King's peace, or quarrelsome sword-and-buckler fellows, with whom I have little in common, being myself a very quiet and inoffensive man, who dearly loveth quietness and good-fellowship."

Presently the host and his serving man hastily carried in the big man's supper or, as I guessed pretty shrewdly, that which had been originally intended for me. However, I made no attempt to undeceive him, and waited patiently until something else should be cooked for myself, whilst he applied himself diligently to the destruction of a hot mutton pie and a brimming measure of October ale.

As soon as he had finished the burly man drew his seat to the fire, bellowed loudly for a cushion, which was immediately brought in, and then, stretching his feet to the fire, and leaning back at his ease, he thoughtfully picked his teeth with a twelve-inch whinger.

"Aye, lad," said he reflectively, "in good sooth a sure means of obtaining due respect is the proper usage of the voice in all dealings with such public robbers as innkeepers. I learned the habit of it twenty years ago in Burgundy, and found that it has always got for my poor little silver sixpence more comfort and attention than the broad gold piece could purchase for the velvet-mouthed traveller."

I ventured to ask him how his method had succeeded in dealing with foreign innkeepers who happened to speak no other tongue but their own.

"Excellently well, i' faith," he replied. "The same practice holds good in any land, for if ye shout loud enough at your entrance into a French or Flemish house of entertainment they are sure to bring ye something to drink, and a little extra swearing after that invariably produces some food, especially if they know ye are from England. It is a golden secret, boy, a golden secret that holds good over the world—a golden secret for ensuring peace and comfort, and yet I give it ye for nothing."

I thanked the burly man for his kind advice, and when my own supper was at length brought in, I fell to so heartily as to attract many approving remarks from my new friend.

"An excellent good thing for the chest and lungs is it to eat and drink heartily," said he, "and there is nothing so strengthens the voice as good October ale, especially if ye take an egg beaten up in it just before going to rest. Therefore, boy, if you will follow the advice of

an old traveller, you will improve your chest and your voice at the same time, and so be enabled to slip pleasantly and peacefully on your way through the world."

As soon as I had finished supper, he bade me draw my seat over to the fire, where we sat talking together as lovingly as brothers, whilst the host and his wife took it by turns to stand just without the door in case my companion should chance to require anything in a hurry.

Presently the burly man remarked the new anelace that hung from my girdle, and asked leave to look upon it closer, whereupon I unhooked the weapon and handed it across to him. He drew it from the sheath, examined it closely, balanced it, thrust with the point, made a downward chop or two with the edge, and then returned it to me with the approving remark that it was a trig whinger and a bonny piece of steel.

"What," said I, cocking my ears and brightening up, "come you from the West Countrie, sir?"

"No," said he, with an expression of large-souled contempt. "I thank God, I be Lancashire."

"But," said I, hesitatingly, "you make use of West Countrie words."

"Like enow," said he carelessly, "I have been so long there with my Lord, John d'Mohun, of Dunster, that, unknown to myself, I may have picked up some of its uncouth words."

I asked him very anxiously if he were still in Lord d'Mohun's service.

"I be Andrew Privett, his Head Forester," said the burly man, drawing himself up proudly. "If ye come from those parts ye are like enow to have heard of my name. I bear another name in merry Lancashire, and would be little like to bear any name long if I were to

venture across the border of the Duchy again—nathless, Lord d'Mohun, Heaven bless him, is one of those noble hearts that think naught of a deer or two, especially if they were slain in another Lord's forests, and moreover deems it no shame that an honest, peaceful man like myself should have slain his man in fair fight."

"I have much need of Lord d'Mohun," said I, with my heart beating against my ribs loud enough to be heard by my companion. "I have much need of his aid and protection. Could you tell me, good sir, where I might find him?"

"Aye, that can I," replied the forester, regarding me with a searching look, "for I accompanied him to London this very day, and left him at his inn at the "White Cat" in Southwark ere I wended hither—but tell me, lad, what want ye with Lord d'Mohun—surely a boy like you, with no down as yet upon your chin, hath not slain a man?"

I answered in some confusion that I did not seek protection on my own behalf, but that his Lord could aid me in a matter which meant life or death to one very dear to me.

"Aye, just so," answered the forester, winking and nodding his head very sagely. "An provided that your friend hath slain his man in fair fight—fair fight, mind ye, young sir, for my Lord will have naught to do with any of your low, sneaking stabbers in the back—ye may rest assured that the noblest heart in England will take him under his protection. But," he added, frowning terribly and shaking his head ominously, "I rede ye well, young sir, I rede ye well not to approach him if there has been a foul blow or a thrust in the back dealt."

I assured him very earnestly that my friend was innocent of such a deed, and after a friendly homily

from Andrew Privett on the care of the chest and the tone to be used towards all innkeepers, I shook hands warmly with him and retired to rest.

I rose betimes next morning but found, early as it was, that the rough forester had already departed, having previously left a message for me that I was to follow him across to the "White Cat."

Accordingly I swallowed a hasty breakfast and set out for Southwark, but on arriving at Lord d'Mohun's inn learned to my chagrin that he had set out on horseback, accompanied by his page and Andrew Privett, but half an hour before. The host of the "White Cat" could not or would not give me any information as to where Lord d'Mohun had gone, or when he would be likely to return, and as there appeared to be no use in my loitering about Southwark I turned homeward very much cast down.

When I reached Thames Street I found Andrew Privett, to my great astonishment, sitting outside the "Rose." He was in a towering passion, and to my eyes appeared to be eager to pick a quarrel with some one, inasmuch as he leaned far back in his chair and had his big limbs stretched out across the sidewalk, as if to invite some preoccupied and unlucky stranger to trip over them. Mine host was skulking about the door in evident fear of his life, the hostess was peeping furtively from behind the red lattice in the guest-room, and prudent citizens, whose business happened to take them past the "Rose," glanced suspiciously at the big forester, who sat scowling, with a can of ale in one hand and his sword in the other, and very sagely crossed over to the other side of the street rather than risk brushing up against him.

## CHAPTER X

I ENDEAVOURED to soothe Andrew, and at the same time find out the cause of his ruffled temper, but he gave me little time to do either, inasmuch as he let slip a Flemish oath or two, which brought the landlord skipping out of doors, and in again on perceiving that they were not addressed to him, and then burst forth into a torrent of abuse upon London town, its inns, its innkeepers, its inhabitants, and particularly its customs.

"Beshrew the stifling prison!" he cried angrily, "where a true man must needs go about like a shaveling monk, or one of their bucky citizens. A pest upon their town-bred habits—a pest upon their silly customs—a pest upon their uncivil landlords—they would kill a poor, quiet, inoffensive man like myself in a se'night."

He buried his face for a minute in the great can of ale, sighed deeply, wiped his beard in a corner of his cape of Lincoln green, and then went on.

"Now lythe ye, Guy, what befel me to-day, and then judge ye what reason I have to be incensed against London and its ways. I accompanied my Lord this morning to that nest of gilt pastrywork which they clepe Westminster. Well, sir, we had scarcely come to the gate but two archers crossed their bills before my Lord's horse, and a gilded anatomy of a Captain in the Royal Guard demanded our weapons, on the pretext that he



was ordered to disarm all persons, whatsoever their degree, who entered the city during the week that Parliament sat.

"'Is it the King's command?' asked my poor, simple Lord.

"The poppet made such a bow that I thought that the plates of his gilt harness would crack in two, and my Lord thereupon gave up his sword and dagger like a lamb. I cried out lustily behind him not to do any such foolish act, as there was evidently some plot against his life or liberty, but the poor, simple innocent laughed foolishly and rode on, bidding me yield up my weapons likewise and follow him. I was quite willing to follow him, but I had no intention of yielding up my weapons in that easy way, inasmuch as I was once nearly lured to my death by a winsome lass in the same fashion in merry Lancashire. So I first tried civil words with the Captain, begging him courteously to allow me to follow my master, and when they failed, I endeavoured to ride over him peaceably. However, the ill-conditioned ninnyhammer called out for his guard, and as half a dozen of them came out scowling and commenced to bend their bows and hitch their quivers up on their shoulders I saw that it was a hopeless case, and so rode home with a heavy heart."

I asked him if Lord d'Mohun was at that moment in Westminster.

"Yes, lad," said Andrew, almost tearfully, "and like to remain there for the remainder of his existence, owing to his guileless nature."

"Now Heaven be praised for the news," said I, standing up and clapping my bonnet on my head. "I shall go straight to Westminster and seek him."

"Do not, do not, lad," cried Andrew in much alarm. "I tell thee that they will not permit any one to enter their

gates with weapons at his side, so it is quite evident that there is some treachery intended against the simpletons who are so fond as to comply with such monstrous conditions."

Notwithstanding the honest forester's protests I divested myself of my sword and anelace, though he devised all manner of ingenious ways whereby I might conceal them about my person in such a way as to baffle the scrutiny of the guards, and I also firmly declined the offer of his own short girdle-knife, which he endeavoured to persuade me to conceal down the leg of my boot.

I had great difficulty in restraining my laughter at his suspicions, and tried hard to convince him that the disarming of all those who entered Westminster was a guarantee that no brawls should occur within the precincts of the Royal Palace ; but Andrew shook his head knowingly, and said that if I was resolved upon thrusting my head in the lion's den in search of Lord d'Mohun, I was to bear in mind afterwards that he had given me ample warning of the dangers into which I was so wantonly rushing.

He would not let me go until I had promised that in the event of my meeting his master in prison I would tell him that he, Andrew Privett, intended to prowl nightly about Westminster until he should effect his escape, and when I parted with him at the head of Thames Street, he bade me farewell as gloomily as if I were going to execution.

Half an hour later I entered Westminster without let or hindrance of the archer on guard. Just as I passed through the gate the bells of the Abbey, St. Margaret's and the Palace, burst forth into a perfect cascade of deep-tongued music, and the narrow little streets instantly became so full of their rapidly

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stricken notes that the upper stories of the houses seemed to rock in the humming air. I made my way slowly through the crowded byeways, and though bewildered with all I saw and almost deafened by the bells, I nevertheless observed that the streets were narrower and the houses smaller than those in London town. I also noticed that the crowd which jostled me wherever I turned was greater and noisier than that which I encountered in the capital, and yet I was some time staring at the streets and the inhabitants of Westminster ere I recognised in what way the two cities differed.

In London half the buildings were shops or warehouses, in Westminster all were inns or private dwellings. The London streets were filled with busy folk and grave-looking citizens, but the crowd in Westminster was made up of splendidly-dressed ladies and gallants, shaven monks in black habits, soldiers in bright armour, singers with ribbons at every joint of their bodies, painted mountebanks and such wastrels. In fine, it gradually dawned upon me that London was a city of traders and the centre of a grave, sedate, money-getting people, while Westminster was the abode of a brilliant and dissolute Court, which was rubbing cheek by jowl with a great Abbey full of Benedictine Monks.

It seemed so strange to me, who was wont to think that all abbeys were as peacefully situated as Torre, to see the monks elbow their way through the motley crowd of archers, jongleurs, ladies, and courtiers, and I wondered if they did not find that city of wild license and profligacy a disturbing place for prayer and meditation.

There was a large building close by the Abbey devoted to the use of the King's archers, and from this place at intervals came the clang of trumpets mingled

with loud shouting and swearing. Even whilst I stood before the Minster, listening to the deep murmur of the organ within, I heard the chorus of a questionable song come roaring forth from the archers' quarters, and I thought to myself that the Monks of Westminster were either all deaf, or they did not sing nones and vespers with all that coil going on as devoutly as the White Canons of Torre were wont to do.

Alas ! I was yet to learn that the Abbey of Torre differed from many other abbeys in more than its mere situation.

My meditations were cut short by the headlong rush of a gaily-dressed crowd that carried me bodily forward and up to the very gates of the Minster. Presently the bells ceased ringing, the gates opened, and a strong body of spearmen came forth from the Abbey, and having cleared a wide passage through the crowd, halted and turned inwards.

Finding myself thrust forward into the front I addressed myself to a soldier close by and asked him civilly what sight the crowd waited to see.

"The Queen is at Mass in the Abbey," said he, without turning his head, "and is expected to pass hence to the Palace."

Two or three beside me cried out that the Royal Archers were coming, and I was bending forward to get a better view of their handsome livery when a voice that sounded familiar, but by no means welcome, to my ears, said behind—

"I think it be the runagate, your honour."

Then another voice, that I also seemed to know the sound of, muttered—

"I should wish to make certain that it is he ere I draw nearer," whereupon I turned about and found myself face to face with Bassett and his vile assistant, Wilmer.

We looked at one another for a space without uttering a word, and then all my pent-up indignation found relief in the anger wherewith I addressed them.

"Take assurance from the best source, ye murderous twain," I cried hotly, "that I am Guy Engledew, alive and strong, though not through your fault, ye cowardly traitors—and mark me too, Master Bassett, that I will live to see you and your fellow-assassins dangle on the gallows-tree."

Wilmer shrank back among the crowd before my angry face, but Bassett, although visibly disconcerted by my words, nevertheless drew a short sword, hitherto concealed under his cloak, and gripped me hard by the bosom of my doublet.

"Help! help!" he cried at the top of his voice. "Help me and ye be liege subjects of King Edward! This is a runagate page who hath stolen a horse from his master and who would now offer resistance to the representative of the law. Aid me, good people, aid me, I beseech you, in securing the villain."

Those surrounding us laughed at his cries and hustled us to and fro in the effort to secure better places for themselves, but no one offered to interfere between us.

"Villain yourself," I cried, out of all patience. "Unclasp my doublet on the instant or I shall make you rue the moment you laid your hand upon it."

But as he still held fast to me like a bulldog, I gripped him in turn by his short, thin beard, and struck him a mighty slap across the face with the palm of my hand.

I heard a dozen voices cry out around us, "The Queen! the Queen!" and then four archers of the Royal Guard flung themselves between us. Two of the archers disarmed Bassett and bound him with a couple

of bowstrings in a twinkling, whilst the other two, having first searched me hastily for concealed weapons, did a similar kindly service to myself.

While the fellows were binding my hands, I looked wildly about in search of some friendly countenance to bear me out in my trouble and instantly lighted on one that I recognised, but the recognition thrilled me with such a shock of astonishment that I nearly sank to the ground, for there, standing quietly before me—dressed in a dull, rose-coloured silk gown and veil, with long, white, jewelled gloves upon her shapely hands and arms and a little gold circlet set about her dark hair—was Dame Joan Brown.

Two pages, whose doublets of cloth of gold sparkled in the sun, held up the furred hem of her silk train, a couple of paces in the rear stood a venerable old nobleman bearing the Royal crown upon a velvet cushion, and behind him, amid a flock of other beautiful maids of honour, I saw in that moment of heart-quelling wonder the flower-like face of Lady Alys.

"Ah!" said the Queen, in the pretty French accent I remembered so well. "How wicked! How very wicked is this brawling at the door of the holy Abbey. Have you no shame in your hearts, you two? No fear of the good God that you should thus insult His house? And you, you bad, white-faced man, how dared you threaten the youth with a drawn weapon in the precincts of a Royal Palace?"

"Your Majesty," said Bassett, who was now trembling like a reed in a storm. "This youth is a most desperate character who hath beaten his master's son, stolen his Lord's horses, and run from his service. He is skilled in every manner of crime, and, therefore—knowing his violent nature—I had to have recourse to my sword in order to apprehend him, inasmuch as I

myself am an humble servant of the Crown armed with legal claims upon his person."

"And you, boy," said the Queen, addressing me carelessly, "what have you to say for yourself? Are you so young and yet so bad? Does this man state the truth about your violent temper, your thievery, your other wickedness? Yes, or no?"

"Your Majesty," I replied faintly, for my heart sank within me at the thought of being delivered over to Bassett, "he speaks some words of truth, but the greater part of his speech is as false as his own black heart."

I thought for the moment that she started at the sound of my voice, but if she remembered my face she showed no sign of having seen it before, as her handsome eyes looked full upon me without any trace of recognition.

"'Tis true, your Majesty," I continued, "that I struck my noble master's son—I cannot defend myself from that charge even by pleading the insult whereto it was the answer—'tis true I took a horse and rode away from my Lord's house, but then it was for the sole purpose of escaping the cruel death which this murderous man and his friends had prepared against me, and I left the horse with the Prior of Torre, who undertook to send it back to its owner. Therefore, your Majesty, as I am guiltless of more grievous acts than these, which I confess freely, I beseech you not to give me up to these men who have already attempted my life, or you will deliver me over unto hands that will not suffer me to cumber the earth much longer."

The Queen frowned slightly and asked the Captain of the Archers if I too was using a weapon when the guards arrested me.

The Captain bowed, and replied that I was unarmed.



"Release the youth," said the Queen curtly. "As to the man—confine him in the Gate House for drawing a weapon within the limits of our Palace."

She gave a little signal with her jewelled glove, whereupon four trumpeters immediately blew a royal sennet and, without bestowing another glance upon me, she passed on followed by her train.

"Your Majesty! your Majesty!" cried Bassett in a despairing voice, "his former master is Lord Alured Briwere, an attainted traitor, and I have a warrant for the arrest of this young villain, who is his confidential page."

"Your warrant is of no avail within this city," said the Captain of the Royal Archers contemptuously; "so come your ways, sir, come your ways."

"You insult the King's person in mine, Sir Archer," shrieked Bassett, as the Captain laid a heavy fist upon his shoulder. "Unhand me, sir; I am the sheriff of Southampton."

"Then your writ does not run here," roared the Captain, who, as I afterwards heard, was deeply in debt, and on that account hated sheriffs as heartily as Frenchmen; "but you yourself shall run, and that, too, quickly, to the Gate House."

As Bassett, however, continued to splutter and protest the Captain, with every appearance of satisfaction, ordered one of his men to slip his bracer off his arm and thrust it into the prisoner's mouth to stop his ravings, so I had the satisfaction in seeing my enemy marched off in an undignified way that must have been particularly galling to his mean, pompous nature.

Left amid a small gathering of that class of folk who invariably remain to stare at any of the principals who linger on the scene of a recent disturbance, I had ample opportunity of reflecting upon what the Holy Writings



say anent the gratitude of princes and I also thought ruefully of Bevis Mayne's advice.

"I should have put Dame Brown and her niece out of my thoughts the moment I parted from them," I murmured to myself; "but then I was a simple country youth utterly unskilled in the ways of fine ladies. A nod—a smile—a little glance of recognition would have made me the happiest fool in London, but—pah! out on all queens and maids of honour. Aye, Bevis was right—there is no truth or gratitude in women."

Amongst the loiterers about the Abbey gate I observed a page clad in violet and white, who was regarding me with languid curiosity. His hair was curled in a fashion that Heaven had never done for him, his face was as pale as an anchorite's, and I was almost sickened by the perfume of the kerchief wherewith he fanned himself.

The sight of the mommet annoyed me so much that I walked off some distance in order to be quit of him; but, when I halted and turned about I perceived that he had followed me so far and was still regarding me with a look of insolent contempt. In a great rage at being tracked like a deer I walked over to him and asked him, with some heat, if there was anything he wanted of me.

He looked me up and down for a while as though he had never seen a homespun jerkin or a pair of untanned riding-boots before, and then asked me in a mincing tone if I were page to the traitor Briwere.

"I am page to Alured, Lord Briwere, Baron of King's Guard in Devon," said I hotly, "and I allow no one to clepe him traitor a second time in my presence—do ye mark that, my master. Have you anything further to say to me, my friend, as I would fain go about my business and leave you to attend to yours?"

He nodded, so gently that it seemed to me that he

was afeared that his head might come off if he shook it too vigorously, and then lisped that he brought a message for me.

"Then," said I, in a towering rage, "why in the Dowl's name did you not state your business long ago?"

"Because," said he, with a contemptuous glance at my homely dress, "your garments were such as prevented my speaking to you in a less private place."

"What?" cried I wrathfully, "you silk-clad whippersnapper, is that all the message you have for me? By the seven champions, I'll twist your chubble head far enough round to enable you to see down your back unless you tell me at once what fool sent such a fool as you with a message for my ear."

"The Queen," said the other haughtily, "bade me bring you to her private oratory. Her Majesty said nothing to me about entering into an argument with a linsey-woolsey page anent her commands, so if you will follow me I shall fulfil my instructions."

My heart stood still for a moment and then beat fiercely with mingled fear and joy. I bowed my head silently to the insolent minion in white and violet, who whisked about and walked on, and had my conductor been the Angel Gabriel himself I could not have followed him more meekly.

He led me clear of the narrow streets, past the Abbey, through some trim gardens that lay before the Palace, and under a narrow arch where two of the Royal Archers kept guard. We ascended a stair of red and yellow marble, whereof every step was enlaid alternately with the Leopard of England and the Fleur-d'Lis of France in shining brasswork, passed through a guard-room where a score of archers kept ward in easy indolence, and entered a long gallery that was lighted up

by several handsomely emblazoned windows. Half a dozen pages in the Royal colours of white and violet were loitering about the fragrant-smelling cedar floor, and a couple of gentlemen ushers were engaged in subdued, but animated, conversation with three maids of honour who sat in the deep recess of one of the painted windows.

All the occupants of the gallery turned their eyes upon me with varying expressions of insolent curiosity as I entered, and I heard many ill-natured jests whispered anent my rustic garments as I passed. However, I paid little heed to such idle trifles, and followed my guide steadily to the end of the antechamber, where he stopped before a white velvet curtain, whereon were stamped the golden bees and the lilies of France. The page raised the curtain and tapped lightly on a door of ebony and rosewood, a woman's voice, which I immediately recognised, cried "*Entrez*," whereupon the page opened the door, signed to me to pass on, and then closed it softly behind me.

I found myself in a tiny room hung round with dull-coloured sage tapestry. A beautiful cage-shaped oriel window, whose woodwork was composed of some white, sweet-smelling Indian timber, looked forth upon the Thames, and the sun shone through the murry, emerald and topaz circles and lozenges in its upper panes, and gave them the appearance of gorgeous jewels. The ceiling was covered with rose-coloured silk, arranged in fluted pleats, the floor was composed of narrow planks of alternate rosewood and ebony, and the furniture itself was wrought from some species of shining, green wood. It was the most beautiful room I had ever seen or am ever likely to see on this side of paradise.

Queen Philippa reclined easily on a couch in a nest of

soft silk pillows. She was dressed as I had seen her when she left the Abbey, only she wore no circlet on her great coil of dark hair, and her white gloves with their jewelled ornaments were lying at her feet.

The Lady Alys, clad in a robe of apple-green, with a woof of golden thread woven through it, sat near her on a low, carved-oak seat, with a great silver-clasped book open on her knees. I observed that her shining curls were bound about with a white fillet such as maidens wear, and a great thrill of foolish joy went through me.

"Kind Heaven be thanked," thought I, "she is unmarried." However, my simple joy died within my heart as swiftly as it was begotten, inasmuch as the young lady merely raised her eyes to mine for a moment and then lowered them on her book again as if she had never seen me before.

I sank upon my right knee, and bowing my head, saluted the white little hand which the Queen offered me to kiss. Then she bade me rise and look about me, adding with a meaning smile that I might recognise some other friend in the Palace if I used my eyes diligently; but I stood up, blushing outwardly but full of secret sorrow, and bent my gaze on the rose and ebony floor without being able to utter a word.

"What!" said the Queen, with a laugh that sounded like the syrup-sweet chuckle of a blackbird in the greenwood; "have you forgotten Dame Brown's niece? Tell me, young gentleman, do you forget each week what happened the week before, or are you so much in the habit of playing the part of an errant knight towards distressed ladies that you are unable to keep tale of all you rescue?"

"Your Majesty," said I, recovering my self-possession and speaking very gravely, "I do not recall anything to mind unless what is your will."

The Queen laughed merrily and sat up straight amid her cushions.

"Ah!" said she, "I see you are as discreet as you are bold, two excellent qualities in a youth. And you, Alys, my child, have you forgotten your knight, for he proved himself more your cavalier than mine, inasmuch as he went to your assistance ere he came to the aid of his liege Queen? Come! come! girl," she added a little petulantly, "even if he did obtain a kiss from you it was your own fault, and you should not bear malice on that account. Stand up, wench, and bid the poor boy welcome."

The girl stood up flushing painfully, and drew off from her right hand a little grey glove, embroidered on the back with tiny seed pearls.

"Heaven forbid, my Queen," said she in a low voice, "that I should be so wanting in respect to your Majesty and ordinary gratitude to this young gentleman as to bear malice to him for the price he was pleased to ask for his services, and which was your pleasure to bid me pay. Young sir, I greet you, and thank you once more."

She held out her right hand courteously but coldly, and I bent down to kiss her fingers as reverently as a pilgrim might have saluted the Sepulchre, but my heart, which a moment before had been swimming as a stout ship, felt a rending pang, as if it had come upon a sharp rock, and it seemed to fill immediately and sink within me.

I had little skill in women or their ways at that time, for my early experience in the cloister and my late rough life in King's Guard had shut me off as rigidly from all intercourse with them as my mortal body has barred me from conversing with the angels of heaven; and yet I had wit enough just then



“AND DREW OFF FROM HER RIGHT HAND A LITTLE  
GREY GLOVE.”

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to see that in some way beyond my dull comprehension I was already an offence to this fair young creature.

She stepped back from me with a faint look of disdain, and re-seated herself upon the oak settle with her open book upon her knees, whilst I bowed my head in secret shame and sorrow and fixed my eyes once more upon the rose and ebony floor.

"And now, good youth," said the Queen seriously, "you spoke some dark words this morning about your life being sought by others. I do not know what wickedness you may have done, and perhaps I have wronged that pale-faced man by sending him to the Gate House ; however, if you will tell me truthfully what reasons you had in flying from your master's house, and what motive brought you to these parts, I promise, in return for the way wherein you acted last week on the marshes, if you are guilty of any offence your punishment shall be made as light—yes, as light as Justice can make it—and if you are innocent then—yes, I myself shall see to your protection."

Being thus commanded to lay bare my doings, I thereupon related the cause of my flight from King's Guard, the incidents of my journey, and the all-absorbing object of my journey to London town. I think to this day that Queen Philippa must have been the most tender-hearted being that God hath ever called unto high station in any country, inasmuch as whilst I shambled through my simple history (wherein I myself could never discover anything to shed tears over), she turned away her face from mine and kept her little pink-palmed hand before her eyes as though to shield them from the sunlight, and it was not until my tale was finished that I suddenly discovered that the gentle creature had been weeping softly throughout its narration.

Her maid never raised her head from her book during



my speech, but I do not think that she read far, or if she read at all she must not have read deeply, because the tear which she let fall upon the page she held open all the while I spoke showed me that she did not turn over to the next leaf.

I finished abruptly, inasmuch as I felt ill at ease the moment I perceived the effect which my clumsily told story had produced ; but the Queen recovered her self-possession much more quickly than I did.

"Tell me," said she suddenly, "do you know where your fidelity to your master, a captured rebel and attainted traitor, is likely to lead you to?"

I shook my head.

"To the headsman's block and axe," said she, looking steadily at me, "the fitting reward of all traitors and their adherents."

"Then, your Majesty," said I wearily, "I do not much concern myself about such a fate, inasmuch as my life, young as it is, hath been so harried and aimed at that an honourable death with my benefactor would be preferable to the disgraceful one which his enemies are like to bring upon me ere long."

"Your words sound brave and your tale rings well," said the Queen sharply, "but tell me, young sir, can you prove them true?"

"I came to Westminster to-day, your Majesty," said I, "in search of Lord d'Mohun, my master's near neighbour. I have a packet for his hands from the Prior of Torre Abbey, and if his Lordship were here I believe he would vouch both my words and my tale."

The Queen struck a small gold bell beside her, and a page appeared as if by magic.

"Go to the tilt-yard, Lois," said she, "and bid Lord d'Mohun, who is there with the Prince, my son, attend me hither."

The page bowed and withdrew and the Queen relapsed into thoughtful silence whilst her maid bent closer over her book. Presently we heard a firm step in the gallery without, a jingle of mail, and then Lord John d'Mohun, clad in complete armour with the exception of his helmet, and covered with dust, entered the little room.

## CHAPTER XI

HE drew off his great ring-guarded tilting glove, stepped towards the couch and dropped on his knee with all his harness clashing upon him. Queen Philippa laid her hand lightly on the back of his up-raised wrist, and as soon as he had paid it due homage with his lips she made him a little sign to rise.

"My Lord Baron," said she, "I am loth to disturb you and the Prince at your sports, but this youth, who claims to be page to your neighbour, Lord Briwere, bears a packet of such moment for your hands that I was fain to send for you."

I drew forth the little sealed packet I had received from Prior Edmund, and handed it respectfully to Lord d'Mohun. He took it from me with a careless glance of recognition, and then stood for a few moments turning it over in his great, strong hands, but without showing the least curiosity to discover what it contained.

"*Allons donc!*" cried the Queen, clapping her small jewelled fingers together like an impatient child. "This boy, in whom I take a whimsical interest, tells me that the packet recommends him to your service, and I am all curiosity to know what account the Monks of Torre proffer in his favour."

"Then, your Majesty," said the Baron, smiling, "I must perforce get some one else to read it for me, inas-

much as I devoutly thank the saints that I know nothing of either scrivenry or reading ; however, the boy hath a clerkly turn and knows such arts, and under your Majesty's permission I shall bid him read forth the contents."

"No ! no ! my Lord," said the Queen, with a quick suspicious glance in my direction, "I myself shall be your secretary on this occasion."

Lord d'Mohun smiled archly and comprehensively, and handed her the packet.

She turned it about quickly, examined the wax and thread of floss silk that secured it, and then stretching it out to him asked if he knew the seal upon the crossed folds.

The Baron glanced closely at the great cob of sealing-wax upon the packet and smiled again, but this time with a certain amount of pride.

"I may know nothing of scrivenry or books, madame," said he, "but Rouge Dragon himself can scarcely be better acquainted than I am with the arms and charges borne by all the noble houses of England. Yes, your Majesty, I recognise the impression—it is the Conventual seal of the White Canons of the Premonstratensian Order."

"*Tiens !*" cried the Queen, taking a gold bodkin from her coil of dark hair, and ripping the floss silk and seal upon the packet. "Now we shall see what the White Canons have to say about this young runagate."

Then she spread out and proceeded to read aloud the letter wherein Father Edmund commended me to the care of Lord d'Mohun.

She read very deliberately, all the while affecting to discover much difficulty in deciphering the clear and beautiful writing of the Prior ; but it seemed to me that the gentle-hearted creature took far more pleasure in

reading the wholly unmerited praise of my kindly teacher than I did in hearing it voiced aloud, and so lingered over each word as if it had a pleasant savour in her mouth.

However, when she had finished, she stretched her arms and made a pretence of yawning, and then she handed the letter back to the Baron with the careless remark that the letter was a kindly one and, indeed, spoke well of me, but, for her part, she was little inclined to place overmuch trust in the good judgment of monks, who, for the most part, were simple folk with little experience of human nature.

"Under your Majesty's favour," said Lord d'Mohun, thrusting the Prior's letter under his hauberk, "I can assure you that the Canon has not erred in this instance, for I myself have some knowledge of this young springald, and know him to be a good lad and heartily devoted to his master. If your Majesty takes an interest in the boy, and desires that he should be provided with some safe harbour whilst he is here in London, I shall take him under my own protection for the nonce, and act unto him as though he were one of my own following."

"Grammercy for your kindly offer, my Lord," said Queen Philippa, smiling, and if ever the angel who records good deeds smiles when he credits some mortal with an act of Christian kindness, methinks he must look as she looked at that moment. "I accept it, and I thank you."

"And you, boy," she continued, addressing me abruptly; "what boon do you seek?"

"Admission to my master's prison," I cried, sinking on one knee, and stretching out my hands to her in supplication, "and leave to share it with him."

"Yes, yes, yes!" cried the Queen impatiently, "I

have granted that long ago ; but have you no boon to ask on your own behalf ? Have you no ambition ? Have you any desire to be a clerk, a monk, a holy priest, or have you other leanings ? Would you wish to follow the fortunes of war, and learn to bend a bow and couch a lance ? Yes ? Answer me quickly."

"Under your favour, my Queen," said Lord d'Mohun drily, "he hath little to learn about monasteries, inasmuch as he was a novice in the Abbey of Torre for close on six years ; and, as for the second choice you offer him, he is no bungler with his hands either, for he slew his man in fair fight some three years ago."

The Queen started back in horror, and crossed herself hastily.

"Saint Michael hover near me !" she cried, aghast. "What, a boy of his years ? *Mon Dieu !* and he hath a face like that of a child angel ! Tell me, thou strange compound of wickedness and fidelity, wherefore one so young as thou art should have dipped his hands in man's blood."

"I am not so young as I seem," your Majesty, said I, blushing, "for I am now in my eighteenth year, though my mean height and smooth face make folk rate me as being younger. As for the man I slew—God knoweth that I slew him sore against my will, for I was full of the gentle teachings of the White Canons when I did the deed—he was a robber and a murderer, and the choice was between his life and that of my crippled father, and so I had no other resource but to act as I did."

"The lad speaks truly," said the Baron carelessly ; "and indeed it was a very commendable action on his part ; but, craving your Majesty's pardon, if you have no further commands for me I shall be glad if you will permit me to withdraw, as your Royal son, the Prince, is awaiting me impatiently below."

Before the Queen could reply the door was suddenly opened, and a young knight, wearing a plain suit of black tilting armour, and with a helmet swinging on his arm, strode in.

He was about my own age, but, unlike me, was tall and swarthy, and looked as graceful as a young stag, even in his heavy suit of armour. Great strength of character and singular sweetness were blended in a curious degree in his countenance. I had no need to look upon him twice, nor to compare his handsome features with those of the Queen, to know that he was the Prince, even if I had not observed the glad, proud look that flashed in his mother's eyes when he entered.

He walked over to the couch, and taking the Queen's fingers between the tips of his gauntleted ones, bent down over her hand and kissed it lightly.

"Good mother," said he in French, "you have spoiled a fair morning's sport by robbing me of my teacher as well as my friend.—Lady Alys Brydonne, God give ye good-morning, and better sense than to spoil your pretty eyes over that vile manuscript.—Sir John, you have lost the favour of your friend, and I shall leave you and my Royal mother to settle between ye which of the two spoiled my lesson and my temper. No, no, Sir John! never shake your head, for there are limits to the patience of even a prince, and so I sent away my grey charger 'Martel' to be unsaddled, and have promised to ride forth a-hawking with Sir Walter Manny."

"Does he make progress with his training, my Lord Baron?" asked the Queen, stroking the dark, glossy curls of her son, and all the while regarding him with a sidelong look of fond pride. "Does he bid fair to do you and himself credit in the future?"

"An he keep his seat as firm and hold his point as

true in the field as he doth at present in the lists," replied Lord d'Mohun with a grim smile, "I warrant there will be a track of empty saddles and widows' tears to mark the course he rides through France in the coming summer."

A deep sigh swelled the bosom of the Queen. She leaned her head sideways on her hand, and turned her face downward to her sage-green silk cushion for a space without speaking. Poor lady; her throne was in the hearts of the English people, who loved her as dearly as she loved them and England; but France—fair, unhappy France—was, after all, her native land.

The young Prince observed her melancholy attitude, and a shade passed over his face, flickered there for a moment, and then disappeared.

"What? Tears, mother?" said he half gaily, half reproachfully. "Now, nay! Now, nay! It is a bad omen to give one tears for one's portion when one is about to set out to the field on behalf of England, our right, and the bright eyes of our ladies. Dear mother, I prithee give me better encouragement. Ah, you smile, and the sun shines bright again.—Lady Alys Brydonne, burn that book, I rede you, or you shall drift either into blindness or a nunnery.—Sir John, I leave you to my Royal mother's care, and I doubt not that by the time I return she shall have so wrought upon your fickle mind that you will be ready to forswear sword, shield, and steed, for the black frock of a Cistercian monk. *Benedicite!*"

And, with a merry laugh, the young Prince walked off, with his harness jingling and clashing with each step he made.

The moment he had gone the Queen seemed suddenly to recall my existence to her mind. She started slightly as her eyes encountered my shrinking figure,



and hurriedly bade me descend to the tilt-yard and await Lord d'Mohun, whereupon I knelt down and kissed her hand, bowed respectfully to the Lady Alys Brydonne, and backed out of the apartment with my head inclined reverently towards her Majesty; for, notwithstanding my country breeding, I was well aware of the Court custom on such occasions.

After a short space the Baron descended to the tilt-yard, and curtly bade me follow him and assist him in disarming. He crossed the yard to a small pavilion, against which were leaning half a dozen headless tilting spears, and drawing aside a curtain that hung before it, led me into a small and meanly fitted room. A camp anvil, with a number of armourer's tools scattered about, a little bare bed, such as I had often seen in a soldier's guard-room, a small oak harness chest, a couple of great iron weights, and a few plain settles constituted all the furniture.

But if the furniture was meagre there was no lack of harness, for the walls were all hung round with ring-mail hauberks, vambraces, cuisses, greaves, gauntlets, et cetera, whilst several shields and helmets of various patterns swung from a spear that was lashed athwart the ceiling.

Whilst I assisted Lord d'Mohun to disarm I observed that all the armour in the pavilion, though differing in make and fashion, was uniform in one respect—namely, it was all oxidised or black, and, as the Baron's harness was white, I surmised that the room was the armoury and private pavilion of Prince Edward, which surmise was confirmed by my presently discovering the Royal cypher emblazoned on the oak chest.

As soon as I had disarmed Lord d'Mohun, and assisted him to resume his ordinary apparel he sent me forth to fetch his charger. I had no difficulty in

performing this office, inasmuch as I had scarcely mentioned Sir John's name to two pages whom I encountered outside, when they were off at the top of their speed to fetch the horse to me. They were so wondrous civil that they would scarcely permit me to saddle and girth the animal, and when I secretly contrasted this courteous behaviour with their former bearing towards me in the morning, I had little difficulty in seeing what weight Lord John's name carried among these butterflies of Westminster.

Ere he rode away, Lord d'Mohun bade me attend him at his lodgings in the morning, when he would make arrangements about obtaining me admission to my master's presence. I thanked him very heartfully, and when he had spurred away I left the Palace yard, passed through the gates, and walked slowly along the river towards London town.

The great expanse of water flowing seaward on my right moved on like the stately progress of an irresistible army, and as I paced on slowly by its margin a sense of the greatness of the mighty river and the comparative insignificance of man was borne in upon me.

"Aye, flow on," I thought, "as ye did a thousand years ago. Time goes on, and eats up every trace of the great ones of the land who lived, wrought, did good or evil, and left nothing behind them but a castle, or an abbey, or a name upon a monumental brass; but Time hath not changed you, Great Power, and you still march on in the same stately fashion as ye did when the heathen Roman was strong in the land. The shock of battle on your margins, the blood of thousands mingling in your waters, and the joys and sorrows of those living and dying on your banks, have never made your tide slacken or hasten its measure these hundreds and hundreds of years. All that time you steadily

held your course, and hundreds of years hence, when I and all around me are resolved into such small particles of dust as to be nameless, you shall still hold on your way triumphantly. Ah me, it seems that the greatest man on earth is a smaller part of the world than the veriest brook that feeds this great river."

Without being able to account for it, I felt utterly cast down in spirit, as though I had been disappointed in all my cherished hopes. I reminded myself over and over again that I had attained the prime end of my journey, that I had been delivered out of the hands of mine enemies, and afforded protection by the highest lady in the land, that I—I, the son of a simple yeoman in Devon—had succeeded in having bolts and bars withdrawn that would have remained fast unto nobles who depended merely on their high rank to obtain such a favour : and yet my mind was full of discontent.

But when I reached that quarter of the marshes where I had first encountered the Queen and her maid of honour, the scales fell from my eyes, and I saw clearly down to the bottom of mine own heart. I was already in love with Lady Alys Brydonne, and reason had been whispering to me ever since I had left her presence what folly, madness, and danger lay coiled up in such a passion.

"Alas !" I cried out in my despair, "had I but known the true rank of ye two women what unhappiness would I not have been spared ! Then would I have never been lured into this hopeless fancy, inasmuch as I would have known from the first that a poor, friendless page, whose only patron is a broken traitor, had no right to aspire to the love of a fine lady of the Court. I would that I had never met you, Alys—I would that you had proved yourself to be in very sooth a city tapster's niece—for my love has burst up into such a fire by this

as to be beyond my power to quell, and I have nothing now to distract me from the suffering which I must bear in silence but the fulfilment of my duty."

By the time I reached my lodgings in Thames Street I was in a calmer frame of mind, and felt almost cheerful. Andrew Privett, who was still sitting outside the "Rose" with a can of ale on one side of him and his sword on the other, jumped up with a loud view halloo when he caught sight of me, but almost immediately his face assumed a look of profound dejection.

"Ah, I know what has brought you back," said he gloomily. "They have allowed you out on parole in order to treat for my poor simple Lord's ransom."

I smiled, wanly enough, indeed, at the forester's suspicions, and assured him that Lord d'Mohun was at that moment at his lodgings in Southwark.

"Truly ! by this cross !" said he seriously, at the same time holding up the hilt of his sword. "Don't deceive a simple man, Master Engledew ; is he really safe in his inn in Southwark ?"

"Or he ought to be by this time," I added, "inasmuch as he left Westminster on horseback half an hour ago."

Andrew heaved a sigh of great content, thanked Heaven audibly, and put the can of ale to his lips and finished it at a single draught. Then he gave vent to another sigh, which sounded like a November gale in a forest, and bellowed loudly to the host to bring him another measure, after which he waxed so noisy and talkative that I began to suspect shrewdly that he had been keeping the landlord pretty busy drawing ale since our parting that morning.

Accordingly I begged him to accompany me within doors on the pretext of feeling the night fog from the river, and he thereupon lurched into the guest-room, where he established himself in front of the fire, and

proceeded to give me a dissertation upon the perils of city life.

"I tell you, friend Guy," said he, wagging his head and waving his great forefinger at me, "that it is nothing short of a miracle that Sir John and yourself have managed to come scatheless out of that springe for true men, which the London rogues clepe Westminster. Now don't tell me, young fellow, that going into a spot where one can be taken at a disadvantage is devoid of danger, for I, in my own person, have had one early lesson of the truth of what I affirm.

"The very pretext that they tender for depriving honest folk of their means of fence proves the cunning of their minds and the falseness of their reasoning. 'So that the peace may be maintained,' quotha! Now I have never seen the peace so well maintained as where every one bears a curtle axe or a good brown sword at his side. And, my good, simple youth, it stands to reason. For when a man knows that his neighbour may put six inches of cold iron into the middle of his last meal on the first insult, oh, believe me, Guy, there are no uncivil words or crooked looks on either of their faces! All is peace and smiles and good fellowship, and each one with his cap in hand to the other—at least it was always so in merry Lancashire, but in London, alack-a-day! all is different.

"Half the knaves here carry nothing longer than a scrivener's knife at their girdles, and such as carry longer iron at their side seem to be in mortal fear of tripping over it. And what is the result? Nothing but bucky looks and skulking frowns and un-Christian thoughts which the knaves are afeared to put into words.

"Now I myself sat outside the 'Rose' this afternoon sipping my ale and taking the air as peacefully as a

friar at a wedding, and, you will scarcely believe me, but there was never a glum-faced rogue of the lot that passed who did not cross over to the other side of the street as if I were plague-stricken."

I had great difficulty in keeping my countenance at the old forester's way of keeping the King's peace; however, I restrained my inclination to laugh, and answered very gravely that London town and the Black Downs of Hampshire were two different places, and I had no doubt that these London folk would feel as uncomfortable in the West Countrie as we did in their city.

"Moreover," I added in conclusion, "we have not come to the city on their invitation, and there is an old saw which says that 'When one is in Rome one must do as the Romans do,' wherefore we must follow that advice, and so make ourselves as happy in London as London customs permit."

This counsel seemed to strike honest Andrew as one that was brimful of vast wisdom, for, when we parted later on for the purpose of retiring, he kept mumbling to himself as he made his way unsteadily upstairs—

"Aye, aye, the younker is right. 'When at Rome do as the Romans do.' Just so, 'When at Rome do as the Romans do.'"

## CHAPTER XII

**I**N the morning I walked with Andrew to the "White Cat" in Southwark, and my companion, taking on himself to announce my arrival, left me at the door and went in search of his master. In a few minutes he returned, and, bidding me follow him, led me upstairs to Lord d'Mohun's apartment.

"He is in excellent good humour, friend Guy," he whispered gleefully, as he ushered me in, "but if you want to aid your friend be sure to dwell upon the fact that he slew his man in fair and open fight."

Sir John, clad in brown riding-boots and hose, and a dark green velvet doublet trimmed with sable fur, was standing by the hearth with one foot on the andirons, whilst his page was bending over it strapping a golden spur upon his heel.

I saluted him respectfully, and waited patiently until it should be his pleasure to address me, but he barely nodded to me, and looked down upon his boot in thoughtful silence whilst his attendant strapped on his other spur. He continued to stand for some minutes in this preoccupied fashion with his foot upon the andiron and his eyes bent on the toe of his boot, and then he suddenly roused himself and took the cap and sword which his page had been all the while holding forth for his acceptance.

"Jean," said he, "have my horse by the barrier on the Tower drawbridge within an hour from now; until that time I will not require you."

The page bowed and withdrew, and when the door had closed behind him Sir John darted a strange look of mingled interest, suspicion, and curiosity at myself.

"Tell me, Engledew," said he, all the while scanning me closely, "what object you had in seeking a lodging in the Tower with Sir Alured when the choice of other gifts were offered you freely by the Queen yesterday? What hopes have you in the restoration of your master to his former fortunes? what trust do you place in his ability to serve you in the future? Come! answer me truly."

"I have but little hope of my master's enlargement, my Lord," I answered sadly. "I have no hope of his being able to serve me in the future, but I have some trust in mine own ability to serve him, and if I can cheer his prison I shall have the happiness of repaying in a little measure some of the many benefits I received from him in the past."

"Would you serve another master as faithfully?" said Lord d'Mohun with a look that seemed to pierce me to the core of my heart. "Would you give the devotion which you now proffer for Alured of King's Guard to another Lord who would promise to treat you in the future as he did in the past?"

"Not while Lord Briwere lives," I replied firmly, for I saw in what direction his hints were tending; "he is my godfather and benefactor, and even if I had to tramp over England with him barefoot I would not leave his service to be the King's page."

I had scarcely uttered these words when I regretted them, for a great fear came upon me that Sir John might take offence at my refusal to serve under his



banner, and, withdrawing his favour, leave me as hopeless of seeing my Lord as when I first knocked at the Tower gate. However, if he felt any annoyance at my speech he did not exhibit any anger, and after remaining a while as if in deep thought, he abruptly bade me follow him, and we set forth for the Tower.

I had some difficulty in keeping up with his long strides, and in addition to his hurried step I had other obstacles to encounter, inasmuch as the people who stepped off the side-walk at the sight of his furred jerkin and gold spurs, made up for their servility by shouldering me into the kennel after they had passed him. However, I was far too much occupied with other matters to take notice of slights, whether intended or accidental, and followed as close upon Sir John's heel as I could until we stopped at the Tower barrier.

The archer on guard happened to be the same who had pocketed my gold piece in return for my unguarded confidence, but his fashion of challenging us was very different to that whereby he had stopped me a week back. He very respectfully asked Lord d'Mohun his business, and, with many regrets at being obliged to detain him at the barrier for a few minutes, despatched another soldier of the guard in search of the Lieutenant of the Tower.

In a few minutes there appeared a very venerable old man dressed in a habit of black velvet, and bearing the Royal cypher embroidered on the bosom of his doublet.

He greeted Sir John in a fashion that showed me the two were old acquaintances, and they remained talking apart for a space, until the Baron turned suddenly to me, and, making a careless sign that I was to follow them, passed through the gate arch and walked slowly across a wide paved courtyard in deep converse with the Lieutenant.

I followed them closely, and, though my feelings were strung up to cracking point in expectation of the long-awaited-for interview with my Lord, I could not be insensible to all the things around me.

Great stacks of war material covered the paved court. Cases which, judging from their size and shape, contained arms, great heaps of armour, mounds of bow-staves, and stacks of neatly piled sheaves of arrows were scattered all around.

A perfect army of bare-armed, leather-aproned smiths and armourers were busily engaged in sorting out and examining from the great heaps of harness, armour that appeared to be newly from the anvil. As fast as they examined each piece of harness they cast it to one side, and, almost as soon as they did so, it was borne off by others to the great square tower in the centre of the courtyard, which I surmised was the armoury.

A number of bowmakers and fletchers were sorting and proving the bow-staves and arrows, and a couple of stout yeomen, with a great heap of bowstrings beside them, were testing them by hanging them one by one with a heavy weight at the end from a rough frame like a gibbet.

I also remarked a number of curious little tubes bound with brass, and mounted on wheels like carts. They seemed such puny and senseless weapons, that I wondered at the apparent folly of collecting such a number, but since then learned what deadly engines of destruction they really were.

Passing by the great square tower, into which the long train of sweating smiths bore their loads of armour, the Lieutenant stopped before a tower, which I since have heard is known by the name of the Beauchamp Keep, and there knocked upon the door. After a grating sound of locks and bolts, the door was opened

by a man dressed in a complete suit of greasy leather.

He was thin but sinewy, and had coarse, red hands like raw hams of pork. A great forest of rusty-brown hair nearly covered his head, face, and throat, and amid this thick growth his bleared red eyes looked forth from two small patches of wrinkled skin that marked where his cheeks began under his thick beard.

The Lieutenant said some words which I did not catch, upon which the leather-clad man bowed, and taking a bunch of keys from a hook upon the wall led the way nimbly up a flight of stairs, unlocked a door, and held it open with a hideous leer.

Lord d'Mohun turned and said, "Within half an hour," whereupon the aged Lieutenant bowed and descended the stairs. I followed Sir John into the compartment, and, as soon as we were fairly inside, the leather-clad man closed and bolted the door behind us.

The room was cleanly and comfortable. Fresh rushes and white sand were strewn upon the floor, and a bright fire burned on the hearth. The furniture, though plain, was comfortable, and, with the exception of the iron grating outside the window, there was little about the room to suggest a prison.

I glanced quickly around the apartment in search of Lord Briwere, and in a corner observed a bed with a figure lying so still upon it that at first my heart grew cold.

Lord d'Mohun and myself remained silent and motionless for a space until the figure on the bed stirred slightly and said—

"Is that the leech?"

The voice was so weak and thin that I could hardly

believe it was the same that, but one month before had rung so loudly in the hall, and halloaed so cheerily to the gaze-hounds in the greenwood around King's Guard. I could scarcely refrain from weeping, and I saw that Lord d'Mohun was also affected, as he answered—

"No, Sir Alured, not the leech ; we are better than such craftsmen. We are two true friends."

"Who call themselves friends to the ruined Briwere ?" said my Lord, so weakly and feebly that Lord d'Mohun had to bend down his head to catch the words.

"I, John d'Mohun, your neighbour, and your page Engledew, who hath come all the way from Devon to nurse you."

My Lord writhed round painfully in bed, and raising himself upon his elbow, turned his face towards us, shading his eyes with one thin hand. I saw his hours were numbered. His eyes were sunken deeply in his pale, haggard face, and even as I looked upon him I saw the sweat of weakness and death was gathered on the thick growth upon his lips and chin.

"Ah," said he, with an attempt at a smile, "you, Sir John, and you too, my poor foot-page, why have you come so far from green Devon to the stifling Tower of London ?"

"To be by your side, my noble master," I said, kneeling down by his bedside and taking one of his thin hands in mine, "so that I may nurse you soon to health, and bring you back to King's Guard."

"Nevermore, my poor Guy," said Lord Alured, sinking back in bed. "Nevermore shall I see the West Countrie downs or my own again. Royal Edward of England can do little more to my shattered body except it pleaseth him to set my grey head on Aldgate Bar, for in a little space I shall be before a higher tribunal than his."

He lay silent and breathing softly for a few minutes, and then continued—

"I have played my game and lost my stake, Sir John, as you yourself warned me I should. I do not repine over the fortune of a fair field, but may a true man's ban and a dying man's curse cleave to the cowards whose cause I espoused, and who deserted me at the time I fought their fight single handed. I have no claims on you, my Lord, beyond our good feelings as neighbours and the memory of happier days spent together, but if you will do me a last service, take my page, Guy, into your service when I am gone. Indeed, I would have wished him to remain on in my service at King's Guard, but that I know full well that my cousin, Sir Thomas, whom I have left as guardian to my son Hubert, though a worthy and otherwise just man, has taken an unreasonable dislike to Engledew. For my son's welfare I have no fears, and I leave him in the hands of God and my cousin, who I know will act to him like a father, but, when I am gone, there is no place that my page can turn to, and as he has served me faithfully, I should wish him provided for."

"I swear I shall act unto him as you have done, Sir Alured," said Lord d'Mohun gravely, "so rest you easily on that score."

"And you, Guy?" asked my master eagerly.

"I shall be loyal and faithful to Lord d'Mohun," I said, with an unsteady voice, "when I take service under his banner, but I will not take my dismissal from yours, my Lord, whilst you live."

"Then you shall not be long wanting a page, Sir John," said my master, with a feeble laugh, "for I am little like to see many suns rise and set."

At this moment the door was opened by the man in the leather jerkin, and, with many bows and apologies

to Lord d'Mohun, he informed him that his page and horse were awaiting him at the barrier.

Lord d'Mohun then bade an affectionate farewell to Sir Alured, and, having renewed his promises about myself, left the room, evidently affected.

### CHAPTER XIII

THAT night I slept, as best I could, rolled up in my cloak in an oaken arm-chair close to Lord Briwere's bedside. I slept but ill owing to my unaccustomed position, and several times when I awoke during the night listened eagerly for the slight sound of his breathing. Late in the night, or early in the morning, during one of these times that I waked, I thought he had ceased to breathe, and in some alarm rose and put my ear close to his heart to find out if he was alive.

I was reassured, though somewhat startled to hear him laugh softly and say—

"Didst thou think I was gone already, Guy, because I lay so still? Why, my poor boy, I have been watching thee twist and turn in that chair since thou didst lie down in it to rest. I am old and frail, boy, and the wound I received at Winchester hath bitten as deeply into my rest as it hath done already into my life. I cannot close mine eyes, Guy, for I have that waking feeling that cometh so often before the long sleep, and, as I have spoiled thy rest for the remainder of the night, I prithee tell me somewhat of King's Guard and of those there."

We talked in a low voice to one another until the first glimpse of morning shone through the window.

I was in great fear lest he might have learned, in

some indirect way, of the treachery that had sprung up within the Castle since he marched forth; but the questions he put to me about the health of Sir Thomas, his loving inquiries as to how Lord Hubert did, and the way he questioned me about his hawks, horses, and dogs, showed me that he was happily ignorant of all that had happened in King's Guard since the ill-fated hour he had set out for Winchester.

I felt it would have been like thrusting a sword into the kindly heart of the poor old dying man, if I had told him that his lands and Castle were in the hands of an unscrupulous and daring villain, and that his beloved and haughty son was an outcast flying for his life.

I may not have answered all that was strictly true to the eager questions he put to me, but I trust that Heaven will forgive the simple deception I practised on my master in hiding the ruin of his ancient house from him in his last moments.

Later in the morning the Lieutenant appeared, and, having greeted Lord Alured very courteously, showed me a warrant for my commitment to the Tower for whatever period that my master should remain within it. He informed me that I was a prisoner at large, and would have liberty to come and go at will anywhere within the ramparts. I was to have a room in the basement of the Tower wherein my master was confined, and, in consideration of his feeble health, the door of his prison was to remain open in order that I might have access to him at all hours. I thanked the Lieutenant very heartily for the favours he had shown to me, and that evening took up my quarters in a room adjoining that occupied by a leather-clad man, who appeared to have charge of the Tower wherein my master was confined.

During the first day I took up my new quarters, my



duty to my master took me up and down the stairs pretty often, and, as the last step on the ground floor ended almost in front of the room occupied by Leather Jerkin, I could not avoid seeing into his room, especially as his door always remained open.

It was a very barely furnished room as far as furniture went, but was crowded with the most extraordinary lumber I had ever seen. Over the hearth were hung four great axes—not the plain, broad hatchets such as woodmen use, but axes with long, narrow blades that curved outwards like the bent necks of swans. There was a small grindstone in a corner, and in the centre of the room was a table covered with strange-looking knives and tools, whose shapes made me marvel as to their use. A number of curious little iron presses, with long screws projecting from their sides, were hung on the wall like a trophy of arms, and over a bed by the door was another axe, similar to those hung above the chimney, with a great number of iron chains, gyves, and collars of strange patterns hung neatly around it.

That evening, when my Lord had fallen asleep, I descended the stairs on my way to my own apartment, and paused a moment before the gaoler's door, which was open as usual.

A lamp was burning brightly on the table, and, by its light, I saw Leather Jerkin sitting on his bed with one of his great axes, which he held short by its curved neck, with the haft tucked under his right arm.

There was a small heap of very finely-chopped firewood lying between his feet, and he was apparently trying the edge of the axe, for he examined each stick he cut, piece by piece, as if to judge what mark it left upon the wood.

He looked up on hearing my footsteps, and very politely invited me to come in and rest myself before

his fire but, though I thanked him, I nevertheless remained at the door staring at the curious things in the room until, Leather Jerkin observing my gaze of wonder, said in a tone of great satisfaction—

“Ah, you are admiring my tools, Master Engledew. Now tell me which of them your fancy is drawn to most?”

I confessed my ignorance of the use of most of them, and ventured to remark the curious shape of the axe he held in his hand.

He held it up, and after regarding it with a fond look, remarked, “My little favourite,” and handed it to me to examine.

I observed the edge was as sharp as the grinding wheel and oilstone could put on its long, narrow blade, while the material it was composed of was the finest piece of steel I had ever seen. He appeared to be greatly pleased with my remark, and I could see that I had already made an advance in his good graces.

“You are a judge, young sir! You are a judge, and a good judge of a good bit of steel,” said he, regarding me with a very approving look. “Aye, you speak soothly. It is the finest piece of its kind in Christendom and wherefore not, since I serve the noblest master in the world, why should I not have the finest tools wherewith to do his work?”

I asked him if he cut up all the firewood used in the Tower, whereupon he stared upon me for a full minute with such a strange look in his bleared eyes that made me feel uncomfortable.

“Yes, Master Engledew,” said he very slowly, “I perform all the chopping and most of the cooking that is done for King Edward within the fortress.”

Having bade Leather Jerkin good-night, I retired into my room, which, as I have already mentioned,

adjoined his, and slept soundly until the first glimpse of day.

I was awakened by the tramp of many feet which passed round the side of the Beauchamp Tower, and then appeared to halt before the door. As there was some slight bustle outside I thought it might have awakened my master, so I rose immediately, and proceeded to clothe myself. During the short time I was donning my doublet and hose, I heard the murmur of two or three voices speaking in an undertone without the door of the Tower. Then I heard the sound of a dull blow as if some one had dropped a heavy iron weight upon soft earth, and after that came a long silence.

As I passed Leather Jerkin's room on my way upstairs, I remarked carelessly that his bed was disturbed and empty, and I also missed the great axe that usually hung above it.

I found Lord Alured in a weary-looking sleep, so after waiting by his side for a little while, I softly descended the stairs to my own quarters to get my cloak, for the morning, though bright, was chilly, and at the foot of the stairs met Leather Jerkin with his sleeves turned up, his doublet open at the throat, and bearing his great axe under his arm.

He greeted me in a very friendly fashion and, returning his civility, I remarked that he was at work early.

"I' faith, yes," said he, regarding me with a curious look, "I always think the best work is that which is done before one breaks their fast. I have not yet, however, finished my business of the morning, and shall be glad if you will come out to my kitchen and give me your aid in a small matter of cooking."

I remembered afterwards there was a malignant look in his eyes, but suspecting nothing then, I answered

without hesitation that I should be pleased to give him what aid I could, but that my knowledge of cooking was very limited.

"It shall suffice—it shall suffice," he said gleefully. "Come, follow me, Master Engledew, and I shall show you some Royal cooking, and that with a very hearty good will," and going into his room he hung up his great axe very lovingly in its place above his bed.

He then handed me a small sack full of bay-salt and another of cumin seed and, taking a couple of broad knives and a long iron fork himself, led the way through a passage to a small wicket opening into a tiny yard, surrounded by high walls, at the back of the Beauchamp Tower.

The place he brought me to was open to the sky, and seeing no outlet from it, I looked around in search of some sign of a hearth or cooking utensils, but saw only a cauldron on a fire in one corner of the yard.

Leather Jerkin led the way in great spirits and, peeping into the cauldron which was full of hot water, declared it would serve excellently. He then tumbled the bag of bay-salt into it and bade me afterwards add the cumin seed.

I told him that although his kitchen was very bare, his cooking, as far as the seasoning went, was very strong, and asked him where the meat was to come from.

"The meat? quotha," said he with a grin in which his bleared eyes were lost in his thick whiskers. "The meat? Ah! that is outside, my young master. Stir round the soup well with this iron fork while I go out and fetch it in. The meat, quotha," and I heard him laugh hoarsely to himself as he crossed the little yard and passed through the Beauchamp Tower into the great square at the other side.

I stood stirring round the boiling water as directed, and was wondering what our gaoler wanted with this strong, strange broth, when he returned with an osier-basket in his hand and, stopping in front of me, suddenly produced from it to my great horror a freshly-severed human head.

He held it as near to my face as he could, but I hastily shrunk back from the ghastly thing he held up, while he pointed out with what neatness the axe had done its work.

"A Lollard priest," said he, surveying his work with great pride, "who thought he knew more of law than King Edward, and had a better knowledge of the Scriptures than the Bishop of London. However, he acknowledged very humbly, poor gentleman, what a fool he was to discuss such questions with them when he addressed himself to the hardwood pillow this morning. A worthy gentleman and a Christian priest, say I. He gave me two gold pieces to strike hard and, you may be sure, Master Engledew, I gave the poor gentleman satisfaction, for his head hopped a good foot from the block when I struck with my pet axe, 'Angle-maker.' Two gold pieces! As nobly given as though you were a lord. Well, rest you well, gentle Lollard," and he dropped the head into the boiling water. "Two gold pieces! Well have you no reason to complain of my skill, my worthy frere, and, moreover, I have put an extra quantity of cumin seed into the water, so I warrant your head shall keep sweet and remain unmolested by the birds of the Aldgate.

"Ah, yes, Master Engledew, if chance or misfortune (which is nowadays so common) should lead you into like case, take a friend's advice and do not forget to be generous to the executioner."

He was very anxious that I should attend to the fire

and aid him in his loathsome office, but I declined and, at the first opportunity, stole away sick at heart, nor did I dare to look out of the front door of the tower which stood open, on my way upstairs to my master's room, lest I should see the sight I knew was outside in the quiet Tower green.

I sat in the arm-chair by Lord Alured's bed for about an hour before he stirred and opened his eyes. I asked him how he did, but he shook his head as much as to bid me not to speak to him. Presently Leather Jerkin came in, bearing some beef and bread on a platter, and a flask of wine which he left on the window sill, and, giving me a horrible grin, withdrew. I begged Lord Alured to take some food or wine, but all the sign he made of having heard me was the same quiet shake of the head as before.

In about an hour's time the Lieutenant of the Tower, accompanied by a grave-looking man, arrived, and the latter going over to Lord Alured's bedside took up his hand and held his wrist awhile. He gave me a piercing look, and turning to the Lieutenant drew him out of the room, and the two spoke in whispers upon the landing, after which the grave-looking man descended the stairs leaving the Lieutenant standing alone at the door.

He beckoned me apart, and when I crossed the room and stood respectfully before him he asked in a low voice if my father's name was Robin and if he had been in the service of Lord Briwere. I answered him in the same low tone, in order not to disturb the sick man, that my father's name was Robin Engledew, and that both he and his father before him had been in the service of the House of Briwere.

"I knew thy father well," said he softly. "A bold yeoman and a good archer. We stood side by side

against the Bruce at Loudon Hill, when the Hammer of the Scots was King, and I owe my presence here to-day to his sturdy help on that bloody day. Ye look a good lad, and I am sure ye are one if ye were bred by Robin Engledew. I have no doubt ye are a brave lad, too, so brace yourself for the message that the learned leech bid me give ye. Your master cannot live till morning, therefore take the advice of an old soldier and fortify yourself by some food and wine so that you may have the greater strength to watch and tend him the better for the few hours of life he hath still left. Eat and drink a cup, boy, even if you do not relish it, for, believe me, that an empty belly makes a bad soldier and a worse nurse." And with a kindly nod the old man left me with my dying master.

I perceived that his advice was matter-o'-fact and true, so I crossed over softly to the window where the platter of beef had been laid, and was about to carve a slice when, happening to glance down into the court, I saw a sight that made me lay down the knife hastily.

## CHAPTER XIV

A FEW paces below the window there was a shapeless bulk lying on the pavement covered with a piece of sailcloth. A pair of feet thrust out toes downward from under the cloth showed me plainly what this shape really was, even if the other gruesome surroundings did not tell of the whole sorry tragedy that had happened there early that morning while I was dressing leisurely in my room.

Close to the shape under the canvas was a wedge-shaped block of hardwood, with a hollow about the size of a man's neck scooped out of the centre of it, and down either side of it was a long streak of human gore which had made its way in little black rivulets that had wound their way and finally settled in sickening little pools among the paving stones.

Leather Jerkin, with a basket upon his arm, was whistling like a blackbird whilst he threw sand upon these little pools, but it seemed to me that the blood came welling up from the earth through the white sand fast as he scattered it as if it were crying out pitifully to Heaven for vengeance.

I turned away from the window, leaving the food untasted, for I felt then as if a mouthful would have choked me ; and though in my time I have seen much blood flowing when swords were out and men's passions



were high, yet even to this day, I could not look upon the sight of a man being done to death by the law, in its cold and dispassionate fashion, without feeling the same faintness and horror.

Although I felt weak from fasting I sat by Lord Alured's bedside all day, for I could not bring myself to go near the window until it was dusk, and even then I shut my eyes lest they should encounter what I had seen a few hours before. I ate and drank a little, and endeavoured once more to induce my master to do likewise, but he made me a little impatient sign to hold my peace, so I desisted.

A little after the time when the light faded away completely Leather Jerkin entered, bearing a lamp which he placed on the table, and asked very civilly if there was anything he could do for me. I answered him somewhat hastily that I had all I wanted, whereupon he bade me good-night and retired, and shortly after he left my master closed his eyes, and after sighing wearily once or twice fell into a slumber. I sat listening to his deep breathing for a space, and then, worn out with watching, I myself dropped off asleep in my chair.

I must have slept for some hours, for when I awoke there was a faint gleam of morning outside in the square, and the lamp on the table was guttering up and down.

Lord Alured was sitting up in bed almost naked, with his eyes wide open, and a look about them such as I have never seen in those of living men.

He grasped my arm tightly with his right hand, while his left hand fumbled with the bedclothes that he was casting from him. I endeavoured to cover him up again and induce him by soothing words to lie down, but putting my hand away he thrust one foot out of bed as though he would rise.

"Hark ye, Guy," said he, and his voice was strong as when he was in King's Guard. "Hark! There are a thousand bugles blowing the Briwere Mot. Hark to them! Again and yet again! Stand fast my bonny archers and draw the silk as far as your ears. They waver! They waver! By Saint Paul! Forward my merry men all, and upon them with the pike and blade."

Then he stood up and cried out thrice in a loud voice, like the blast of a trumpet, the battle cry of his house.

"Hardily! Hardily! Hardily!" and then slipped down senseless on the floor.

I heard hurried feet coming up the stairs, and presently Leather Jerkin ran hastily into the room, and between us we lifted him up and laid him in his bed. We covered him up, and forcing open his mouth I poured a little wine down his throat.

In a minute or two he sighed and said faintly—

"Lay me by my dame's side at the foot of the Lady's Altar in Torre, and place my sword on my breast with my hands crossed over it."

Then after a long pause—

"Take off mine armour, Guy, I am cold and weary and would rest," and with a sigh his spirit passed.

I composed his limbs and closed his eyes myself, and, though I was weak and ill, rejected all proffers of assistance from Leather Jerkin, for I was loth that the honoured body of my noble master should be touched by the foul hands of an executioner.

When I had covered my master's face I sat down until such time as I might venture to wait upon the Lieutenant of the Tower, but in an hour's time the worthy old man himself came to the Beauchamp Tower and, taking off his velvet cap, walked over to the bed and raised the sheet from the dead face.

He looked down sadly and steadily upon it and said—

“As brave and as thoughtless a man as ever flung away life and fortune. Ah! little did you think, my Lord, when you, a stripling of eighteen, rode on the right hand of Edward Longshanks into the Castle of Stirling, that I, who then marched in behind you as a simple archer of the Percy's, should be your gaoler in your old age. Well, farewell old comrade! Ah, well-a-day! it is not always the highest head that rests the easiest in its old age.”

He then told me he had already sent a mounted messenger to Westminster to acquaint the King with my master's death, and, observing how distressed I was, he drew me away with many kind words from my dead master's side and posted an archer in my place. As I accompanied the Lieutenant across the square I could hardly restrain a shudder as we passed the place of execution. The canvas-covered shape and the block with all its revolting surroundings had been removed, but the white sand sparkling in the bright spring sunshine seemed to bring to mind rather than blot out the memory of the deed enacted the day before.

To distract my mind from my sorrow the Lieutenant led me to the great heaps of war material, and informed me they were being got together in view of the King's expedition against the French, which was expected to sail from Dover early in the approaching summer.

Amongst other things, he pointed out and explained the uses of the curious engines which I had noticed on my arrival in the Tower. They were, as I have said, tubes of wood open at one end and closed at the other, and were covered around with thick jackets of leather secured on the outside by strong hoops of brass.

When used they were charged with a canful of black

dust, which, on a light being applied to a little hole at the closed end of the tube, exploded with a noise like thunder and a great cloud of smoke, amid which they threw calthrops and little iron spheres. The Lieutenant showed me a handful of this dust, which resembled black sand, and told me it was the invention of a monk of Oxenford, whereat I was greatly shocked that a holy man, whose mission ought to be peace, should have given such a devilish secret to the world for the greater destruction of men.

My friend the Lieutenant, however, laughed at my scruples and said—

“Natheless, friend Engledew, I do not think the frere of Oxenford shall do much harm by his invention after all, for I myself have but little faith in these noisy toys of the King.

“’Tis true he doth take a great interest in them, and was fond enough to vow to me some while since that one of them was worth a squadron of horse. I pointed out to him the danger of carrying the devil’s dust wherewith they are charged, and the uncertain trick which the engines themselves have of bursting and slaying all who chance to be within the same parish, whereupon the King looked mighty grave. Then I went further and said that they were of more danger to our men than the French, and I know he was displeased with my ploy. But when I finally wagered him that I would engage myself with twenty good archers from Cheshire or Huntingdon to take twenty of his bombards, break them up into tooth-picks, and slay the men at them ere they could get the clumsy things yare, his Majesty waxed very angry, and rated me warmly for a white-haired old fool. However, methinks he was half convinced by my reasoning, inasmuch as, after storming awhile, he laughed and said that doubtless I

had been a good soldier in the time of his grandfather, Edward Longshanks, but the art of war had changed mightily since then."

At this point in the Lieutenant's speech a soldier came up, and, putting a packet into his hands, informed him that the horseman who had brought it was waiting at the outer barrier, along with six mounted archers.

The Lieutenant broke the seal and opened the packet. It contained two scripts of parchment, apparently written by the same hand, one being addressed to himself, the other being for my hands. That which was addressed to myself was a letter written on behalf of Lord John d'Mohun by no less a scribe than the King's secretary. It informed me briefly that Lord d'Mohun had secured my release from the Tower, and had, moreover, obtained permission for seven of my late Lord's men-at-arms, taken prisoner at the late affair at Winchester, to accompany Lord Alured's body to Devon for the purpose of giving it the rites of Christian burial. The letter further on informed me that the seven men had been released on their agreement to take service under his banner, and were under instructions to obey my orders in all things. As soon as we had seen our late master's body honourably interred, we were to set out immediately for Sir John's castle of Dunster in Somerset, and there await orders to join him either at Dover or London. This letter, which was signed with a cross, bore the impression of Lord d'Mohun's seal at the foot. The other parchment, which was an order to the Lieutenant for the release of the bodies of Alured, late Lord Briwere, and Guy Engledew, squire to John, Baron of Dunster, was signed by the King.

The Lieutenant then gave orders for the horsemen to be admitted; and as they came clattering and sliding over the paved courtyard, it was with much surprise and

joy I recognised in the leading horseman my old friend, Hal Panton.

The words we spake in greeting were short and sorrowful, but mingled with them was a strain of thankfulness, that Heaven had brought us twain together to do reverence to our dead Lord at the last sad honours we could render him.

Hal and four of the archers dismounted, and, leaving their horses to the care of their companions, accompanied me to the Beauchamp Tower and upstairs to where our dead master lay. On the floor beside the bed was a light, straight coffin, which had been hastily made by the yeoman carpenter in accordance with the Lieutenant's orders, and in this we laid our honoured master and sorrowfully fastened down the lid. We then bore it on our shoulders downstairs and across the square to the gate, where a light-built wagon, drawn by two good horses, was awaiting our melancholy burden. We placed the coffin upon it, and I covered it over with a rich piece of damask which I found in the wagon ready for that sad decoration.

When my men were mounted, I tarried a little while with the Lieutenant, who had come to the barrier to give orders for our passage forth. I thanked him very heartily for the kindness he had shown, pressed his hand warmly, and, mounting the horse provided for me, gave the word to set out.

The wagoner cracked his whip, my companions touched their horses with their spurs, and we passed under the arch, where the venerable old Lieutenant stood cap in hand, his aged face bent down into his silver beard, at the head of the Archers of the Guard, who were drawn up in line with reversed pikes.

It was a trifling but none the less graceful courtesy, that last mute farewell of the old man to his former

comrade, and methought it had its source in something more than mere respect to the dead ; for as I passed him, I observed a tear fall into his white beard, where it hung and shone like a dewdrop in a hedge.

When we reached the top of Tower Hill we drew rein for a moment, and I glanced back at the great fortress wherein I had witnessed such grim proofs of a King's displeasure during my short imprisonment. I could not repress a shudder at the thought of the many bloody secrets that the old walls held within their stone womb ; and, when we turned our faces west and plunged into the city, I seemed to breathe freer the moment I turned my back upon it.

We passed down Tower Street and thence to London Bridge, where we were detained some time at the northern gate owing to a great press of country carts that choked the causeway. Although the damask shrouding of the coffin effectually hid its shape, and so gave no hint as to what we really convoyed, the appearance of eight armed and mounted men accompanying it drew considerable amount of attention to the wagon and ourselves.

Whilst I sat on my horse, impatiently waiting for the press to move on, a hand was laid upon my boot, and looking down I perceived Bevis Mayne standing by my stirrup, with a new habergeon on his arm.

I shook hands warmly with him, and told him that I expected to be on my way to the wars ere the summer set in.

"And return before Christmastide with a walletful of French gold, I trust," said he, patting my horse on the neck. "But tell me, countryman, whither are you bound for now with all this tall and goodly company?"

I told him my destination, but without mentioning what we brought with us.

If I had either spoken in a lower voice, or had related to him the purpose that took us to Devon, I would have spared myself some anxiety, and, perhaps, have also given a wretched man a little extra time for repentance—but then I could neither read what was passing in the minds of others, nor foresee what my words could have brought about later on, and so I answered as I did, and Fate arranged the rest.

"'Tis a pity it is not two months hence, fellow-countryman," said Bevis, smiling, "for then I might be e'en jogging with you myself—as on the first day of June my indentures shall be out, and I shall be turning my face to the West Countrie, to aid mine uncle in his armourer's shop in Southampton. If you be going to the wars, Guy, and I to Southampton, I am not likely to see you before you go, inasmuch as all things point to the King embarking from Dover; but no matter whence you go, half my heart goes with you, fellow-countryman—and mind you bring it back along with your own, hale and sound, from France ere Christmas comes."

We shook hands and parted, he on his master's business and I on the last service I could do for mine.

Passing along the southern shore on our way to Lambeth, I glanced across at Westminster, where, apart from the Abbey and the pinnacles and gable roofs of the town, the Palace, with its graceful turrets and glittering roof, seemed to float like a beautiful ship on the Thames.

The sight of its snow-white walls and gilded spires caused a mist to come before my eyes, and in it seemed to float a flower-like face surrounded by little burnished curls bound with a white silk snood. I turned my head away, and said to myself—

"Guy Engledew, thou art either as mad as any of the poor wretches who are chained up in Bethlehem, or else



a very mommet of thine own sick fancies. If thou art the first, seek the physician ; if thou art the latter—as thine own wit will confirm—strip off the rags of folly that flap about thine eyes and blind thy reason. Set thy face cheerily towards the future, and prove unto thyself that thou art a man !”

Alas ! alas ! down deep in the bottom of my surcharged heart I felt that I was nothing more.

## CHAPTER XV

**W**E lay that night at Guildford, and resumed our journey so early next morning that we were obliged to saddle our horses by candle-light. We set our faces to the west road three hours before daylight, and as the morning was chilly and our next stage a long distance off, we rode forward at as brisk a pace as the poor light would permit and the surly wagoner was pleased to drive his cattle.

Twice within the first mile we covered Hal Panton declared that he heard the sound of horses galloping round us, and stopped to listen. But on each occasion we drew rein no other sound came to our straining ears but the faint crowing of the farmyard cocks around Guildford, and Hal shook his head doubtfully as we resumed our way. Presently he drew rein a third time, and I was about to jest him about being as yet half asleep, when a couple of voices in front cried "Stand," and at the same moment an arrow whistled through my cloak from behind and stuck viciously in the cart.

This was followed by several other arrows that dropped in among us from the front, none of which, Heaven be praised, did us any harm ; but as I was unwilling to risk our lives by standing in the middle of the road to be shot down at leisure by unseen enemies, I shouted out lustily to my companions to leave the

roadway and shelter in the neighbouring hedgerow. Accordingly the archers flung themselves from their horses immediately and took cover ; but I had no necessity to bid the wagoner look out for himself, inasmuch as he had already gone off like a hare at the first alarm, nor did he rejoin us until late in the day.

We lay very close and still, with our horses' bridles across our arms, each one holding an arrow fitted to his bow-string, and in a little while I observed the shadowy outlines of a clump of horsemen trotting down the road, whereupon I bade my men let slip a flight at them, which they did with a very hearty will.

The light was bad, and I think that we did but little execution among them. However, we knew immediately that two shafts at least went home, for we heard a piercing cry from a man and the shriek of a horse in its death throw, and at the same moment we saw a dark mass come down heavily on the road. The remainder of our assailants immediately turned and galloped off as hard as their horses could bear them ; but, fearing this retreat was but a ruse to draw us from our shelter, we did not dare to venture out, and so lay very close, with our fingers nipped round the feathers of a fresh flight of arrows, all the while waiting breathlessly and listening to the groaning of the wounded man on the road.

Presently the sun peeped up, and then we saw a horse and man lying upon the dusty highway about six score off. The horse had been slain outright by an arrow that had entered into its very heart by way of its near shoulder, but the man himself was living, and was nervously patting the dust with his twitching hands, and coughing and gasping in his agony.

Seeing no one else in sight, we ventured forth and approached him. He was a beetle-browed fellow, with

the fiend's own mark of cruelty writ large all over his ghastly face, and therefore none of us felt much pity when we looked upon him and saw, as we looked, that he was already dying. We could do nothing for him, inasmuch as the arrow which had passed through his lungs from armpit to armpit carried death along with it; but he begged so piteously for water that the hardest-hearted torturer in the world could not have refused him, so I filled his own iron head-piece at a little roadside stream, and held it to his blood-frothed lips.

He drank as greedily as a tired horse, notwithstanding that each mouthful he gulped brought on a fresh fit of choking, wherein he coughed up his life blood. Presently he thrust back the helmet from his mouth and thanked me faintly, whereupon I asked him why he and his companions had so murderously attacked us. For answer he pointed to the cart with a hideous grin, and dropped his hand as though it were loaded with shackles.

"What?" I cried in amazement. "Would you have done murder to gain possession of a dead man's body?"

The dying robber regarded me with a pitiable look of terror, and then, sitting up after an incredible struggle, asked me in a wheezing voice if there was a corpse in the wagon. I nodded and thought how swiftly his own time was coming, for even as he spoke I heard the rattle through his words.

"Then," he gasped, "there is little wonder that our plans came to nought, for God's curse was upon them from the first. I heard you say on London Bridge that you travelled to Devon, and so thought it was the King's treasure you bare to Plymouth. I would that death had come upon my heels when bound on other business than this, inasmuch as there is a savour of sacrilege

about it that sits heavy on my mind"; and with a prayer that ended in a cough and a gasp the wretched man died. Fearing that the remainder of the gang might take courage to return and attack us again at a less favourable place for defence we left him lying by his dead horse, and pushed on rapidly.

We took it in turns to drive the wagon until we met the wagoner at a turn of the road about ten miles from the scene of our skirmish, and bade him sharply resume his place with his team. He was very pale and frightened, and during the remainder of the journey required no urging on our part to keep his horses going at a good pace, as he appeared to be in mortal terror of our animals outpacing his.

The remarks we exchanged amongst ourselves anent our recent skirmish warmed up old Hal Panton's memory about other and more bloody battles, and gradually our talk drifted to Lord Alured's fatal expedition.

We were riding apart from the others, and Hal had no hesitation in saying that the fatal quarrel with the unhappy Tyrlawney of Hope's Dene, the first step in that hapless expedition, was nothing but a cunningly planned lure to draw Lord Briwere into open rebellion.

"I do not know myself," said Hal in a low voice, glancing fearfully around as though he feared the very hedges should catch his words; "but wise folk say the King at present is in as desperate straits for money as that dead ruffian we left behind us was an hour ago. He can raise no more money in England by fair means, his very crown jewels are in pawn in Germany, and he hath a costly war facing him abroad in France; but, if it were not the King himself who wrought so on our poor Lord's mind with his choppings and curtailments to cause his broad lands to escheat to the Crown, then

it was that foul night-bird, Sir Thomas Siaward, who goaded Lord Alured to acknowledged treason in hopes of pandering for the guardianship of young Lord Hubert during his minority."

I thereupon told honest Hal what I had overheard pass between Sir Thomas and Master Bassett while sheltering in his workshop in King's Guard ; how Lord Hubert was to have been done to death by Wilmer ; how the guilt and horrid punishment of the crime were to be laid on me ; and finally finished with an account of the way we two boys had escaped and parted.

Hal heard me through without any other interruption than an occasional oath and a slap on his thigh, but when I had finished he cried out—

"By the Black Rood I see it all now, Guy ! Why, it is as plain as the face of a Flemish hostess."

Then, dropping his voice again to the tone he had spoken in before, "With young Hubert out of the way (and he were no loss to merry England, although he was his son), the villain Siaward is the only one to succeed by eigne to the Barony and broad lands of King's Guard. And Bassett, that dough-faced coward, with his bloody mind and shaking hand, he too hath a weighty share in this vile plot, and shall, doubtless, divide the spoil. I see it all !

"When the storming of Hope's Dene was barely over, ere the last arrow was sped and the last man fallen, that same trembling villain Bassett came to him, with a piece of parchment in his shaking hand and two hundred lances at his craven back, and with a hemming and quavering voice told Lord Alured he was an outlaw.

"A very worthy sheriff ! A very vigilant officer of the Crown ! Pardee ! How did the villain know that Sir Alured was about to mete out punishment to

Tyrlawney? How did he happen to have that writ of outlawry so ready to his hand? How was it that the country-side was so well acquainted with our line of march and so well-prepared for us unless the whole business had been planned out months before?

"As to the county forces whom we encountered, by Saint Martin!—and he was a soldier too, Guy—they seemed to rise from the ground like ghosts wheresoever we turned. Day after day they increased as we weakened, and though we strove to bring them to close quarters ere they should outnumber us, they continued to fall back before our banners as long as we were on equal terms. But they never left us; halting when we halted, moving forward when we moved, they clung to our skirts like dogs on a bull until we dragged our way to Winchester. You know the rest, Guy; we were cut off from the West by the Hampshire levies, outnumbered in front by the King's troops, disheartened at the first onset wherein Sir Alured dropped with a shaft in his groin, and so the lave of us surrendered at discretion.

"From what you have just told me I do acquit the King of all share in the plot, but natheless I doubt if he will refrain from having his share of the feathers when the carrion crows start rending the dead eagle they have killed among them."

We rode hard all day, and towards night reached Poole. Here Hal and I had a debate at supper as to what way we should finish our journey. Hal was for resting for the night where we were, and pushing on in the morning with a change of horses, for which we could leave our own tired cattle in pawn. However, I was in favour of taking shipping direct for Torre, as we would by that means get a night's sleep, and at the same time be borne on our journey whilst we rested.

I also pointed out that, in addition to our way by road being a longer route, we should be in danger of falling in with some of Sir Thomas Siaward's freelances, who would very probably be prowling about the country between Exeter and Torre, and this last argument carried the day against honest Hal's objections to the sea route. Accordingly, after supper we sallied forth together in search of a ship-master who would be willing to land us at a point near the Abbey in Torre Bay, and came upon such a necessary ally in the person of a very gruff old master mariner, whom we encountered in a tavern down by the quay. He told us he was bound for Plymouth by that night's tide, and at first made many objections to going so far out of his course as Torre. He asked us so many questions as to our profession, the number of our party, and what weapons we carried that I began to wax wroth, and answered that if he looked with suspicion on eight honest men bearing no other arms than yeoman's swords and bows, and deemed such freight too dangerous to carry across Lyme Bay, to say so at once and we would seek other conveyance.

At my reference to our arms I thought his withered brown face took on a more pleased expression, and I perceived that we had been so far playing at cross purposes with one another.

"Easy! Easy! young sir," said he complacently. "Ye must not take my questions amiss. I meant no offence, and ye must know that a master mariner need exercise caution as to what passengers he takes, and what course he steers in these dangerous times, when the Calais pirates are a-sweep along the coast from Deal to the Land's End.

"I tell thee I would not take a cargo of your shaveling monks or fat aldermen for a cap full of silver, for they



would but hamper me and my men if it came to either running or fighting—but as ye say that the rest of ye bear bows and blades, why, then, in God's name I will take ye and your company for two silver crowns.

"Put them and their horses on board my creyer, **the Saint Michael**, which lieth by the quay wall before the door, and within an hour I shall cast off and stand out for sea."

Within the time given us by the sea captain we had put our horses on board the *Saint Michael*, which was a fine ship of about sixty tons burden, with one great mast and square sail. The crew, who were of that bold race that come from the bleak shore of Cornwall, numbered ten in all, which appeared to me to be a very slender company for the management of so large a craft.

They were a bare-armed, barefooted, and simple folk for the most part, but I noticed that each one down to the ship's boy carried a sword or a cuttle axe by his side, and later on saw other indications of the dangers of their calling in the board-pikes, bows, and bills which stood in racks around the little cabin in the stern where we were quartered.

As soon as the ripple at the stern of the creyer showed that the tide was on the ebb, the master ordered the cables to be slipped and, with a small storm-sail set to give us steerage way, we drifted slowly down the harbour, and out to sea.

When we passed Brownsea Island, the crew took in the storm-sail and hauled up the great yard and main-course, to the time of a quaint sea-song, which they sung together until the ropes were made fast at the bitts.

A steady breeze was blowing from the east, and we were obliged to stand off and on for some hours, thus making slow progress until we weathered Durlston

Head, but once fairly out in the Channel, the yard was swung forward, the sheet slacked aft, and with a bubbling curl under our stem we went rushing along over a smooth sea. When we were fairly out of sight of land, I retired to the cabin, where my companions were already asleep, and rolling myself in my cloak, was soon in as sound a slumber as they, nor did I stir from the position wherein I first lay down until a clank and rattle on deck, followed by a heavy plunging sound over the side, awoke me.

The heaving and rocking motion that followed told me plainly that the creyer was at anchor, and opening the cabin scuttle, I made my way on deck.

It was not yet sunrise, but an increasing brightness on the rim of the sea astern heralded the approach of morning.

There was a faint, grey light all around, and I perceived by it that the creyer was riding at anchor about three bow flights from the sandy beach of a bay where the landmarks seemed familiar, and leaning over the edge of the bulwarks I fixed my eyes earnestly on the shore.

The wind, which had veered during the night, now blew off the land, and borne on it came the measured tolling of a church bell, which immediately told me that our anchorage was in Torre Bay, and our position was close under the Abbey.

I went up to the ship-master, and with no little impatience asked him why he did not land us at once, as there was enough light already to see our way to the shore.

He looked at me with such an expression as one would have cast on a peevish child who asked for a star, and then spat contemptuously over the side.

"Because, young master," said he coolly, "I can

breathe very well as it is with my nostrils and mouth, without requiring other holes being put into my lungs with cloth-yard shafts and crossbow quarrels. During these times, when the Abbeyes are the guardians of the west and south coasts, these worthy monks and their friends yonder would most assuredly fill us full of pains and arrows if we went within bowshot of them in this uncertain light and, therefore, with your goodwill, I intend to lie off shore until there is light enow for them to see we are not Frenchmen."

I then observed for the first time a line of dark figures standing on the beach. Here and there amongst them I caught sight of the white cassock and robes of a monk fluttering in the brisk morning breeze, but the majority of these figures were armed men, and I instantly recognised, in some confusion, how prudent the master mariner was in keeping out of range of them in that leaden light.

Presently the sun heaved up his golden shield through the sea-mist astern, and then the Saint George's cross was run up at our yard-arm. In a little while those on shore perceived our colours, and were evidently satisfied as to our character, inasmuch as they hoisted a white cassock on a spear as a signal that we might land, and accordingly the anchor was hove up, and after two or three short tacks, the creyer ran ashore on a spit of soft sand about a bowshot from the armed party on the beach.

## CHAPTER XVI

**W**E jumped over the side of the creyer the moment she touched, and wading waist deep in water, bore the coffin of our late Lord ashore and laid it on the firm white sand. I then went forward to assure the armed party of our peaceful intentions, and on drawing near them was greatly surprised to see their leader was no other than Prior Edmund in a garb that, to say the least, was a singular one for a churchman.

He was clad in his ordinary habit of the Premonstratensian Order of the White Canons, but instead of his white birette he wore a soldier's bassinet on his head. A broadsword dangled at his hip side by side with his rosary, in his hand he swung a steel sperthe with the practised ease of a soldier, and I observed the links of a mail shirt twinkling on his arms up under the shade of his loose woollen sleeves.

He recognised me with a degree of surprise that was little inferior to mine, and when I dropped upon my knee and asked his blessing, he coloured like a boy who has been detected in some childish masquerade, and hemmed and coughed awhile before he could find his voice. I told him in a few words on what sorrowful mission we had come to Torre. He was deeply affected by my story, and bidding us take up our melancholy burden, he led the way silently to the Abbey, where we laid the coffin before the high altar in the chapel.

The good Prior then handed Hal and the archers over to the care of half a dozen lay brothers, and brought me off himself to his own cell, where he proceeded to disarm, all the while deprecating his martial garb.

"You must not deem it strange, Guy," said he, as he unbuckled his sword, and hung it very fondly and carefully beneath the crucifix on the wall, "that a priest of God should appear in such carnal gear. Is not that a well-balanced tool, boy (handing me the sperthe), and light as a feather, notwithstanding its ten pounds weight—but verily, verily, in these days when our country is threatened from end to end by the enemy, it is not only permissible but fitting that the churchman should aid the State as well as the hired soldier. This hauberk, Guy, was wrought in Spain, and is, as you can very well see, a most pleasing and delicate piece of harness. Moreover, boy, all Abbeyes marching on the west and south have round orders from the King to receive garrisons, and watch and ward for the French by day and night.

"It was to that end you heard the Abbey bells ring this morning when your ship was discovered by our sentinels in the bay, and I was perforce compelled to don these carnal weapons and get our garrison under arms; for you must know we have eighty Flemyards living on us at free quarters during this last week. They are indifferent soldiers and much inferior to our own merry archers, still they are sober and obedient fellows and I have hopes of doing somewhat with them yet—not that I would, of my own free will, again take in hand the marshalling and drilling of men-at-arms; yet, Guy, when the command is laid upon my shoulders both by my Abbot and my King, what am I that I should decline my burden?"

I do not know if my kindly old teacher sought to

deceive me as well as himself by affecting an indifference to his new position as captain of the garrison quartered in Torre Abbey, but the light in his eyes contradicted the words on his lips, and showed that the twenty years of monastic life had not quenched the military instincts that still lingered deep down in the heart of the old Crusader.

I questioned him eagerly about my father and mother, who he told me were in good health and, on my asking him if I should run much risk in meeting any of Sir Thomas Siaward's men between the Abbey and our farm, he answered me with a grim smile that Sir Thomas and his men knew better than to meddle with any children of the Church that came or went on the lands of the Abbey, especially since the Abbot could back his anathema with the carnal weight of eighty lances behind it.

He told me to go forth without fear to my father's stead and, having given me many homilies about the duties one owes to their parents and the cases in Holy Writ where blessings are promised to all dutiful sons, bade me greet my parents on his behalf and directed me to return to the Abbey by vespers. I took my cap and sword and set forth to my father's house, where I was received as one arisen from the dead.

My father clasped my hand in both his and held it as though he would never let it go, while my mother, putting her arms round my neck, clung there with her head upon my shoulder, weeping silent tears of happiness. When they were more composed I sat down by my father's oak cradle and with my right hand still held in his and my mother's arm about my neck ran through the history of my adventures.

Again and again my mother and my burly elder brother made me tell them about my interview with

Queen Philippa, of my imprisonment in the Tower, and the sights and sorrows I had experienced in London. My mother wept softly at my account of the death and home-bringing of the body of our noble master, and my father's lips moved slightly as if in prayer ; but otherwise he seemed to have but one sense during my story, and that was to listen staring, and open-mouthed, until my mother had no more questions to ask and I nothing more to tell when, releasing my hand and stretching his maimed ones to heaven, he thanked God for having been blessed with such a son as myself.

We remained sitting silent, but very happy together, until the sound of the Abbey bell tolling for vespers reminded me of the injunction I had received from Prior Edmund and I rose to go, having first received from my parents an assurance that they would be present at the last rites that were to be paid to our dead Lord in the Abbey that night.

All that evening and up to midnight the great bell of the Abbey tolled slowly and solemnly for the soul of its dead benefactor, and in the church, which innumerable torches and candles made bright as day, the Abbot in a black alb said the solemn Mass for the dead. The coffin lid had been removed, and the dead Baron lay with his face uncovered before the high altar. He was clad in his armour, with his hands crossed upon his sword according to his wishes, and some great slabs of stone on one side and a yawning gap in the floor at the foot of the Lady altar reminded us that there was but one of his dying wishes to be fulfilled.

Hal Panton, the six archers, and myself, with white mourning bands bound around our right arms and great wax candles alight in our hands, stood four aside of the open coffin ; and as my eyes glanced around the aisle

crowded with white-robed monks and steel-clad Flem-yards I thought sadly how few of the dead man's vassals were there. With the exception of my father, who lay in his oak cradle in the shadow of a pillar, my mother and two brothers kneeling beside him, and us eight pall-bearers, there were none of all his great household to do him honour. The echoing voices of the monks as they chanted the *De Profundis*, the deep tones of the stately Abbot as he intoned the Service for the Dead, and over all the measured stroke of the Abbey bell filled me with a deep sense of awe.

I thought how, little more than eighteen years before, he who lay so low and dishonoured had stood full of power and honour at that very altar with his bride upon his arm—his feet had trod on those very stones, then covered with roses but now gaping open to receive his corpse. He had turned back then to stand sponsor for me at the font, and it seemed as if that kindly action had borne fruit in its own season, and enabled me in turn to be the humble means of fulfilling his wishes. As soon as the service was finished, and each of us had taken our last look on the dead face, the coffin lid was nailed down, the shell was lapped in an outer case of lead; two lay brothers soldered up the ends, and then we eight bore it to the Lady Chapel and lowered it into the grave. The Abbot performed the funeral service, and at a signal from Prior Edmund we filled in the grave reverently, and replaced the great flagstones.

Neither my parents nor myself had heart to eat of the funeral feast, which the Abbot bade the lay brothers spread in the refectory in honour of the dead patron of the Abbey, so we set out for our own little stead, where we sat talking together during the little space left between night and morning.

At the first peep of day I embraced my parents and



brothers and returned to the Abbey, where I broke my fast ; and as soon as my party was in the saddle I bade my good old friend the Prior an affectionate farewell and set off with my little party for Dunster.

We rode easily, though warily, and arrived at the castle of our new master two days after we set out from Torre without mishap or adventure.

It was a fine, strong dwelling, and from its watch tower one had a view of as fair a scene of land and sea as it has been my lot to look upon. Every available room and corner was crammed with armed men, who were impatiently awaiting orders to set forth for Dover, and we were perforce obliged to camp out in the courtyard, but as the weather was fine it was no great hardship.

The long wait for the much-talked-of expedition against France had told on the temper of the garrison, and the dissatisfaction of the men broke forth into many quarrels amongst themselves. After about two months of this life, I too began to grow as weary as the rest ; and our impatience had reached fever point, when, on the night of the twenty-third of June, a messenger, splashed from shoulder to spur with the mud of four shires, arrived with a packet from London for the Seneschal of Dunster. It was a message from Lord d'Mohun bidding him have all the men-at-arms in Dunster in the saddle and on their way in haste to Southampton, which town the King had finally decided was to be the gathering tryst of the army for France.

Two hours before daybreak the trumpets in the castle sounded joyfully to horse, and half an hour after we set out to the number of ten knights, twelve squires, and one hundred and thirty men-at-arms. We spared neither ourselves nor our cattle, and only halting for the bare

purpose of devouring two hasty meals a day and a few hours' weary rest at night, covered the distance between Dunster and Southampton in the incredibly short space of two days.

We found the town seething with military preparation. The streets were impassable with multitudes of archers in quilted jackets and steel-ribbed hose, shaggy-haired mariners, armed knights, swaggering squires, and big men-at-arms jostling one another in the narrow streets ; while each hour brought fresh detachments of archers and men-at-arms into the already over-crowded town.

Four of the squires of our party were sent in search of Lord d'Mohun through the town, and we were left some hours standing beside our tired horses in the square before Saint Michael's Church ere they succeeded in finding him.

He arrived in company with Andrew Privett and appeared to be by no means pleased with the despatch with which we had come, for I heard him rate the Seneschal roundly.

"By my halidome, Sir Edward," said he peevishly, "but this was not well done. When I sent you word to come with speed I did not mean you to half kill your horses, nor to tumble nearly two hundred men on top of my neck ere I had time to arrange for their coming.

"You must do what you can yourself to get them accommodation for I cannot get them quarters to-night, and if you are unable to lodge them within walls then they must e'en make shift to lie on the stones."

Accordingly, the greater number of my companions were compelled to spend the night on the pavement of Saint Michael's Square beside their horses, but I was more fortunate in being better provided for, inasmuch as my Lord bade me go to his lodging in Blue Anchor

Lane and take what rest I could as he wanted me early next morning.

He sent Andrew Privett with me to point out where his inn was, and on arriving there, I was surprised to see the humble, not to say mean, apartment wherein the Baron was lodged.

Honest Andrew having summoned the host in the fashion he was wont to, ordered a capon despatch and a can of spiced ale for my supper. It was not very long before it appeared, as my companion had prefaced his order by taking down the hour-glass off the chimney-shelf and placed it and his naked sword upon the table, swearing at the same time that he would slit the landlord's nose if these orders were not fulfilled within fifteen minutes.

I ate and drank like one famishing, for I had scarcely had a properly cooked meal for three days, and my comrade stood over me in a state of huge delight all the while encouraging me to eat more.

Immediately after supper, I begged Andrew to conduct me to my room, which proved to be a tiny hutch of a place adjoining Sir John's chamber. I threw off my clothes as quickly as I could shed them and slipped into the blankets, whilst my companion recounted twelve golden rules for the guidance of my life; but as I fell asleep almost as soon as I got into bed, only two of them succeeded in penetrating my drowsy understanding, and they were—to eat and drink heartily for the love I bore my lungs, and to shout loudly at all landlords in order that I might eat and drink heartily.

## CHAPTER XVII

**W**HILE clothing myself in the morning, I looked forth from my chamber window that hung over the sparkling stretch of Southampton Water, and there saw the fleet of ships destined to transport the King's army to France.

They were anchored in two great lines about a bow-shot from the western walls whereon my lodging abutted, and it has never been my lot, either before or since, to behold so fair a fleet as I saw on that bright morning. I lingered over my dressing endeavouring to count them, but I soon lost tally owing to the closeness wherewith they were moored one to the other, and so was obliged to abandon my attempt to learn their tale, however, I discovered later on in the day that their total number was no less than one thousand and thirty-two sail.

I waited early on Sir John and assisted him to dress.

As soon as he had broken his fast upon a few hastily swallowed mouthfuls, he took his cloak and, bidding me follow, led the way to the Guildhall, where we encountered the Mayor and a bluff, middle-aged sailor, who turned out to be Henry Hood, the King's own ship-master.

Hood was a stout, loud-voiced man whose mien and

speech appeared to indicate no manner of subservience to any living creature save his Royal master ; yet, notwithstanding the curt and almost rough way wherein he addressed both the Mayor and Sir John, his manners were superior to the generality of his class, and his speech was the frank speech of a blunt, experienced man who admitted no superior in his own trade and disdained to crook his leg to any but his God and his King. He was very plainly garbed with a grey woollen jerkin and petticoat, a knitted cap upon his head and long sea-boots upon his legs, but he wore a gold chain and whistle about his neck in token of his office, and there was a look of conscious power in his fearless blue eyes as might well light up the face of one who stood in high favour with his master.

There were many stories current that the King, assuming disguise—which was a diversion he greatly enjoyed—was in the habit of going about with Hood into the taverns most frequented by sailors in Plymouth and Southampton, and there, in the assumed character of a merchant, would hold converse with the rough fellows that some said he valued more than his bravest knights. Although these stories were for the most part absurd fables (for what man of intelligence would compare a score of these uncouth men of the sea with one single knight of birth and renown), nevertheless all England knew how highly King Edward valued Hood, and, even if I had not previously known it, I would have speedily learned his importance by observing how courteously Lord d'Mohun listened to his curt speech and acted on his advice without vouch-saving to gainsay his opinion.

My master and the Mayor sat down at a table covered with parchments, gave me a thick scroll containing the list of ships of the fleet, and bade me call out the names

of the master mariners according to the order wherein they stood on the roster.

As soon as I read out each name, two archers at the door repeated it at the top of their voices to a rough crowd who stood without in the street, and then one by one as he was summoned, each master mariner lurched into the room, growled out his name and the number of his ship, and then lurched out by way of another door as soon as I had verified his presence. They were a rough, bold lot these sailor men, and they stood in as little awe of Lord d'Mohun and the Mayor as they did of me. They swore as freely, and spat with as easy a grace upon the floor as though they were in a tavern, and their speech was so little ordered by decorum that were it not for the stern presence of Harry Hood, who was apparently the only one whom they feared on earth, their mien and language would have overstepped the limits of mere insolence.

This business of checking the tale of the fleet, and the masters and the crews who manned them, was a wearisome task : however, it was at last finished some two hours after noon, whereupon my Lord dismissed me to do what I pleased, and went off himself to dine with the Earls of Northampton and Warwick, at their lodgings hard by the Bargate.

I returned to Blue Anchor Lane and found that Andrew Privett had taken Lord d'Mohun's charger out for exercise, and Jean, my master's page, was also absent, being engaged on some giddy business of his own about the town, and so I was compelled to dine alone. After waiting an hour or two in the hope of either of them returning, I saddled my horse and rode forth to see the great encampment of Irish and Welsh, who lay on the plain to the north of the Bargate, for the townsfolk had so earnestly petitioned the Earl of

Bolingbroke, who was just then in temporary command of the army, not to permit these wild soldiers to be quartered in the town, that he had forbade them to enter the gates of Southampton.

I had heard so much of the courage and fierceness of these Welsh and Irish levies that I was full of curiosity to see them, and accordingly turned my horse's head in the direction of their camp-fires, which stretched in an unbroken line for nearly two miles. The first camp I came to was that of the Welsh, who were said to number ten thousand fighting men led by their native chiefs. They were a hardy, active-looking set, but somewhat under the average height of our own English yeomen. Nearly all were dressed in coarse, grey cloth tunics and hose with a surcoat of white linen, on which their badge, a dragon, was rudely painted in red. Armour they apparently did not use, for I saw none amongst them, and such few bows as they possessed were of such puny size that I immediately formed a very poor opinion of them as a fighting body; but was destined to see what dreadful execution they could effect even among mail-clad horsemen with their long, brown, murderous knives.

As I skirted their camp, those that I encountered raised their dark faces surrounded by long elf-locks, and made some remarks about me as I passed to their comrades in their own language. What they said of course I do not know, but from the contemptuous way they laughed I was sure it was nothing very courteous.

I passed on to the camp of the Irish, which was a little removed from the quarters of the Welsh aids, and was even more surprised by their appearance and accoutrements. They were all big-limbed, powerful-looking men; but the fashion of their clothing and

harness was such as would have led one to have thought that they were of the times of Saint Edward the Confessor. The woollen or linen shirts, which were their only garments, were dyed a brilliant saffron colour, and fell in narrow pleats half way down their thigh. They wore little boots of untanned deerskin laced half way up to their knees with thongs of leather, but the remainder of their muscular legs, between the tops of their buskins and the hems of their pleated shirts, were bare and bronzed by exposure to sun and weather.

Their armour consisted of a little round steel cap, a short shirt of chain-woven mail, and a small round leather buckler ; while for weapons each appeared to possess a broad, straight sword, and a great double-handed axe, but I did not observe a bow amongst the whole six thousand of them, nor did I see a single pavilion, for each man sat or lay on his long coarse cloak, which apparently served him by turns for a tent or a mantle.

They spoke an uncouth tongue amongst themselves like the Welshmen, but, unlike them, did not regard me with lowering looks, but on the contrary shouted out what I took to be greetings as I cantered by, and here and there they stretched out leather drinking bottles as I passed with very friendly gestures.

On my way back to Southampton I overtook Andrew, who was returning with Lord d'Mohun's charger from exercise on the smooth, fresh turf, and, as we rode homeward side by side, he told me that the King and Queen were expected to arrive in the city the next morning. "And then," said he, in great glee, "it shall be—hey ! for France, boys."

This good news was confirmed by my Lord on my return to Blue Anchor Lane, for he bade me go forth and purchase a serviceable suit of harness at his



charges ; so I thanked him for his handsome present, and sallied out to buy it forthwith.

As I entered Saint Michael's Square, I suddenly bethought myself of my friend, Bevis. I accordingly asked a passing citizen to direct me to the house of Master Mayne, the armourer, who proved to have his shop in Bugle Street, and on arriving there walked in and discovered a very hearty old man at work on a chain haqueton.

I asked him if Master Mayne was at home, and he replied very courteously that he himself was Master Mayne, and begged to know how he could serve me, whereupon I told him briefly that I had known his nephew in London and on that account desired to give him my custom. He appeared to be very pleased at my speech, for he laid down his work immediately and bustled over to a workroom at the back of the shop calling out—

“ Ho ! Bevis ! Bevis ! Nephew Bevis ! Here is a gentleman who claims acquaintance with you and on that account desires to buy a suit of harness for the wars. Come forth, nephew—come forth incontinently,” and presently Bevis himself came into the shop with an inquiring look upon his face.

He recognised me with a shout, wiped his oily hands on his apron, and grasped my fist with the pressure of a torturer's thumbscrew, and we stood thus shaking one another by the hand, each asking the other eager questions as to how time had gone with the other, for a long space ere we could get to business.

Then old Master Mayne went through his stock, all the while extolling the merits of each article he showed me, until Bevis stopped him with a laugh and told him that I was a better hammersmith than himself, whereat the poor old man became greatly confused and mumbled

all sorts of unnecessary apologies and excuses. When I had finally selected a plain but serviceable set of harness and was about to take my leave, Bevis drew me apart to his own little workshop for a space.

"Come with me, fellow-countryman," said he with a smile. "I have a gift I have been saving up for thee ever since thou did show me that trick of rivetting in Cheapside. Come, appraise it and try it on."

Then he handed me, with a look of extreme pride, a light and beautiful shirt of mail which was composed of very small rings woven together with incredible closeness and fineness. It was of such delicate workmanship that, when gathered together, it was of so small compass that it could be held in a man's clasped hands; and to prove its strength, Bevis spread it out on his bench and dealt it a lusty blow with the sharp end of a rivetting hammer without starting a link.

He made me strip off my doublet, and put it on over my shirt, in order to see how it fitted; and was as pleased as I was to find it was as perfect that way as it was in other respects. I was so delighted with the gift of my friend that I resolved to wear it home, and accordingly put on my outer garments over it, and vowed as I buttoned my doublet over his present that I would wear and treasure it all my life.

As I was saying goodbye to Bevis, on my way through the shop, I observed a man at the opposite side of the street turn about and walk away hurriedly through the gathering dusk. Something in his gait reminded me vaguely of Maurice Brook, Sir Thomas Siaward's huntsman, but as I could not believe that he would dare to appear in Southampton, the suspicion passed out of my mind as quickly as it had entered it.

I found on my return to Blue Anchor Lane that my Lord was absent, so at the suggestion of Andrew, we

went for a stroll through the dimly lit town to see the preparations the citizens were making for the entry of the King and Queen on the morrow.

While standing near the Bargate, observing a trophy of flowers being erected over the arch, a drunken man muffled in a riding-cape, passed us twice so closely that Andrew, doubling his fists at him, swore that if he trod so near our corns a third time he would crack his crown for him ; and shortly after he passed, a man wearing a grey cloak standing at the corner of a lane as black as night, plucked Andrew by the sleeve and asked very civilly if he could direct him to Saint Michael's Square. We both halted immediately, and my companion was about to direct him when I happened to glance carelessly over my shoulder and observed the drunken stranger close behind us again, and at the same moment I received two stinging blows in the broad of my back.

The two blows, though evidently dealt with the point of some sharp instrument failed to penetrate the mail shirt I wore under my doublet ; but the first was so violent that I stumbled forward a pace or two, and the second was delivered with so true an aim that it stretched me on my hands and knees in the kennel. However, before I could rise or even realise what had happened, Andrew whipped out his sword and cleft the wretch's skull down to his teeth, and as he fell to the ground a broad-bladed anelace slipped from his dead hand and tinkled upon the paving stones. The moment that the fellow dropped, the grey-cloaked man fled like a bat into the dark passage behind, but my companion, instead of following him, flung his weapon into the middle of the street, dropped on his knees beside me, and alternately bellowed out for the watch in his great voice and blubbered over me.



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"Murder ! Murder !" he roared. "Bows and Bills, good citizens ! Bows and Bills ! Look up, Guy," he whimpered. "Look up and say one word to me, Guy, ere ye pass. Ye scurvy jades of Southampton (*crescendo*), fine watch ye keep in this town of yours where quiet, inoffensive men are jobbed in the back as they take the air. Holy Saint Andrew, my patron saint (relapsing again into a whimper) an ye give my poor comrade his life—I'll—I'll—forswear ale—aye, fay, I will—or at least limit my potations henceforth to a mere sip or two—say a gallon before dinner and a gallon at dinner and—and a gallon after dinner—so help me Heaven."

As soon as I could recover my breath I assured Andrew that I was unhurt, whereupon he assisted me very joyfully to my feet, and then proceeded to curse the watch, who presently came running up to know what all this coil was about. One, who bore a lanthorn swinging at the cross of a halbert, lowered his weapon until the light shone full on the cleft head of the dead man, and on looking closer into the disfigured countenance I recognised my old enemy Wilmer.

A feeling of deadly weakness, such as had overwhelmed me in King's Guard on that occasion whereon I had witnessed all the horrible preparations for depriving me of sight and speech, crept over me immediately I perceived whom my late assailant was. I recollected the blood-hound persistence wherewith Bassett had tracked me to Westminster a few months back, the sneaking figure that had dogged my steps in Bugle Street that morning, and the grey-cloaked man who had engaged our attention in order to permit his confederate to do his cowardly work, and so recognised that the wretched Wilmer had been no more than one of many instruments employed for my destruction. I could not guess, by the wildest cast of

my fancy, on what account I should be so marked out, but yet could not but feel convinced that I was being resolutely hunted to my death by unknown enemies, and this knowledge of my danger and my helplessness so affected me that I shook all over as though in an ague, whereupon Andrew put his arm about me in the belief that I was seriously wounded, and half carried me off to Anchor Lane.

On reaching my lodging I stripped off my doublet, mail-jacket, and shirt. Honest Andrew eagerly examined my shoulders and informed me very joyfully that my would-be murderer had only succeeded in inflicting a couple of bruises on my back, and then went off, utterly oblivious of his late vows to Saint Andrew, to celebrate my miraculous escape in a mighty potation, but I, for my part, crept off to bed trembling all over, and started up half a dozen times in the night, sweating with terror, and in the full belief that a grey-cloaked man was standing over me with his hand raised up to thrust a dagger into my naked breast.

## CHAPTER XVIII

THE return of daylight and the natural lightness of heart that is the brief yet joyous possession of youth in a great measure dispelled my fears of the previous night. My duties to my master, moreover, left me little leisure to think about myself as I had many matters to attend to, ere I waited on him at the early hour he had appointed for rising on that memorable morning.

I had to lay out his richest garments, his doublet and hose of stamped Flemish sarcenet, his riding-boots of red Spanish leather, his jewelled baldric, golden spurs and best sword, and, in addition to superintending Jean whilst he furbished up these articles, had also to groom and saddle Sir John's horse and assist him later on to dress.

After breakfast my Lord set forth on horseback for the Earl of Warwick's lodging, giving me instructions ere he departed to meet him at the Bargate against the hour of noon. An hour before that time I set forth, dressed in my best apparel, with the Queen's sapphire twinkling in my cap and the Day Owl's sword shining bravely in its silver-chaped scabbard on my haunch. I encountered such scenes of gaiety and magnificence on my way that my mind threw off the last lingering



fears which had so far haunted it, and I, too, abandoned myself to the universal joy that pervaded the town.

Bands of music at every corner filled the air with sweet sounds and thousands of roses on the ground loaded it with sweetness. Interlaced boughs of willows and oak slips, wreathed chains of flowers, fluttering arches of silk ribbons and linked banners were stretched overhead in all the streets through which the Royal procession was expected to pass. The front of every house was hung with red cloth, all the roofs were crowded with men clinging to them as thickly as flies on a sugar cake, and every window was brimful of beautiful and splendidly dressed women.

The streets were densely thronged with a great multitude of citizens, all merry, all dressed in their best, and the strong double rank of archers and spearmen had much ado in keeping the centre of the thoroughfare clear; nevertheless, smiles and jests were the orders of the day, and I did not hear one ill-tempered word nor observe a single rough or threatening gesture exchanged between soldier and citizen throughout my slow passage through the crowd.

I felt quite cheerful and happy until I drew near to the Bargate and then when I passed the lane where I had so narrowly escaped assassination the previous night a cold shudder ran through me and some of my fear came back upon me like a nightmare. Every time some one pushed against me in the crowd I instinctively clutched my sword hilt, and now and then I imagined I heard some familiar voice whisper behind me, and I would catch myself looking behind me half expecting to find the grey-cloaked man close beside.

Just where I stood the ground was kept by some of the men-at-arms of my Lord d'Mohun, and observing Hal Panton standing close to the gate, I wriggled my

way to his side, feeling that it would be a great comfort to speak to one whom I could trust.

We exchanged a brief nod, and then in a low voice I told him of my adventure of the night, and asked him what he could make of this murderous set upon my life. He listened to my story with a serious look upon his hard, brown face and glanced warily about him ere he replied.

"I do not know, Guy," said he in a low voice, "what way you may have offended those in high places—you yourself can best guess how—but there is one matter quite patent to my simple understanding, and that is, your life is like to be a short one if you venture out after curfew whilst Bassett remains in this town."

"Bassett in Southampton?" I repeated aghast. "Then I am undone; for I am convinced that he will leave no corner unsearched where I could hide from his vengeance."

"I do not wish to unstring your nerves, comrade," continued Hal in the same cautious tone as he had previously addressed me; "but not only is Bassett in Southampton, but he is, moreover, in high honour. He passed through the gates an hour ago in company with the Mayor and his fat counsellors, and was trapped out in his Sheriff's robes, with a gold chain about his neck, and his frame swelled out to bursting point with pride. Depend upon it, boy, that he is in high favour just now. The King is either indebted to him for some recent service, or hath need of his aid in the near future. Wherefore remember that the power of such a villain is bounded only by the opportunities you offer, and so sleep lightly o' nights, and do not show your nose out of your lodgings after sunset."

Just then Sir John, accompanied by a number of magnificently dressed gentlemen, rode through the

Bargate. They halted and dismounted, whereupon I, in company with several other squires, stepped forward to take our masters' horses.

"Keep close to the gate, Guy," said my Lord hurriedly, as he threw me his bridle. "Watch me close, and if I raise my glove—so!—see that you bring me 'Champion' immediately."

He stepped into the middle of the road among the other noblemen, and, just as I reined back his charger from the arch, the distant flourish of trumpets and a hoarse yell from the Welsh and Irish, who lined the road without the city, announced that the Royal party were approaching.

According to the ancient custom of the town, the gates of the Bar were closed and sparred, and a dead silence fell upon the great crowd gathered within the walls. While I stood breathlessly awaiting the next event Hal whispered to me the names of the different nobles who stood in the open space before the Bargate, and, notwithstanding that they were the most famous names in England I heard him clepe them one by one as stolidly as though I listened to the speech of a phantom in a dream.

"That tall, thin knight with the grizzled hair and beard," he whispered, "is the Earl of Bolingbroke, the King's Marshal. He, with the fair hair and the crimson doublet of velvet, is the Earl of Northampton, and beside him is the Earl of Warwick. Yonder worn-looking knight in cloth-o'-gold is the Earl of Arundel, and the one-eyed man with whom he is holding converse is Sir John Chandos, the most famous lance in Christendom——"

A loud flourish of trumpets without the gate broke off Hal's discourse, and a voice outside cried, "Open your gates, ye burgesses of Southampton!"

A dull humming murmur rose from the crowd like the sound of a million bees swarming, and every face lighted up with suppressed excitement ; but as yet no one shouted in that vast throng.

The town major on the battlements above answered the challenge in the approved form.

"Who knocks so loudly at the gate?" he cried. "Who demands admission to the free city of Southampton?"

"I, Blue Mantle, Pursuivant," replied the voice outside ; "in the name of Edward, King of England and France and Lord of Ireland."

The Mayor ordered the gates to be opened, whereupon four heralds, clad in splendid tabards, rode in blowing a fanfare upon silver trumpets, and presently the King himself appeared, mounted on a beautiful white Arab, with Queen Philippa riding at his right hand and the Prince on his left.

Then arose a mighty cheer, which made the very walls quiver, and while the startled air hummed with its notes it was re-echoed by another mighty shout from the fleet in Southampton Water and the Irish and Welsh on the plain outside the walls. The King's eyes sparkled and his brown cheeks flushed with pleasure at this greeting. He lifted his plumed cap of maintenance and cast one proud and happy look upon the cheering crowd ; then he tightened his rein and drew up his steed, while the Mayor, in his robes and bare-headed, handed him the keys of the Bargate and wished him and the Queen welcome to Southampton.

During the time the Mayor was mumbling through his speech I had ample opportunity of taking note of the King I was about to serve across the seas.

His face was extremely handsome, and his well-shaped head was poised on a body that was as graceful

as it was powerful. The easy skill with which he reined in his restless horse, during the Mayor's dull speech, showed he possessed the trained hand of a good horseman and soldier, and the fashion in which his quick, sparkling eyes scanned the faces of the crowd convinced me he was a prince well in touch with his people and anxious to know their wants and necessities. Methought, however, that his straight brow and firm mouth showed a spirit that was much more eager to discuss demands than to grant them, and, indeed, without intending to wrong his memory, I had no reason to alter this estimation of his character in later years. His habit was of peach-coloured velvet, which sparkled with gems, he had gold spurs on his white leather riding-boots, a great ruby in his cap, and looked so gallant, manly, and gracious, that I felt in my heart it was a glorious privilege to fight in the cause of such a prince.

When the King had formally received, and as formally given back, the city keys with some courteous expressions to the Mayor, he spoke a few words to the knights, who received him bare-headed, gave the signal for the procession to proceed, and, amid the ringing flourish of the trumpets and the joyous cheering of his subjects, he passed on.

I saw the Prince rein in his horse and lag back from the King's side. He turned in his saddle and beckoned with a smile to Sir John; so I hurriedly led over "Champion" to my master, and, having assisted him to mount, saw the two ride down the street side by side, while the remainder of the Royal train filed in two abreast through the gate, and followed the King and Queen slowly through the streets.

A horse ridden by one of the maids of honour, frightened by the shouting of the crowd, reared and

nearly threw his fair burden. I caught the restless animal by the bridle and led it on a little space, soothing and petting it, but as it still continued to exhibit signs of fear I asked the young lady if she would wish to dismount. However, the brave girl, though evidently unable to control the horse, refused to leave the saddle, whereupon I offered to lead it through the streets as far as the Queen's lodging, which small service she very gratefully accepted.

The following day my Lord attended a council which the King held in the banquet hall of the Castle, and while waiting for him in the cloister-like covered walk which runs along the battlements on the western walls I perceived two young ladies approaching. As they drew near I recognised one to be the maid of honour whose horse I had led through the streets the previous day, and so I stepped aside, cap in hand, to permit her to pass ; but, happening to glance at her companion, I felt a pain in my bosom as though an appledrane had stung me in the heart. She was no other than Lady Alys Brydonne, smiling and nodding as I had so often seen her in my dreams.

The two ladies stopped, and Lady Alys's companion held out her hand to me with a gracious smile.

"Young gentleman," said she, "yesterday I was almost as frightened and confused by the crowd and the shouting as my horse was, and so I fear I did not thank you for your assistance as heartily as I should ; therefore accept my thanks now, and do not think I was unmindful or ungrateful for your help."

I made some lame and feeble reply, and bowed low to Lady Alys, all the while wondering what I should say to one so proud and cold as she ; but ere I could address her she held out her hand to me as graciously as her companion had done, and presently I found

myself, to mine own great astonishment, chatting and laughing with the two maids of honour as though we had been fast friends all our lives.

I know not what we talked of, and, indeed, the subject must have been trifling, inasmuch as I can neither recall it to my mind now nor guess how I succeeded in sustaining my part in such a conversation.

Alys was merry, and bantered me lightly about the lady's brooch I wore in my cap, as though she was ignorant as to the identity of the donor.

"See, Marion," said she to her companion, "how bravely this young squire bears his lady's favour in his cap, and mark, too, how rich it is in itself. Now God defend the poor Frenchman he encountereth in his first field, since the bearer of so fair a token of a lady's love is like to prove a shrewd foe."

Notwithstanding her jests and high spirits, she conveyed to me in that subtle manner wherewith a woman can so readily transfer her thoughts without the utterance of a single compromising word, that my safety in the coming war was by no means a matter of indifference to her and my heart glowed like a sunset at the vain thought that I was dear to her. Presently, however, a cold suspicion drifted into my mind like a sea-fog, and it chilled and blotted out the midday glamour of my joy, for notwithstanding that I continued to smile and answer jest for jest as lightly as they were showered on me, the bitter thought was uppermost in my mind that the change in her manner was due to the change in my fortunes.

"Beshrew these calculating Court dames," I thought savagely, "who frown one day and smile the next on the same man. It is easy to see that you can be as gracious to me now as you were disdainful to me three months ago. Ah, yes, fair Mistress Alys Brydonne, it

is one thing to be a page to a ruined traitor, and it is another matter to be a squire to a powerful Lord ; but, I thank Heaven, mine eyes are opened, and your pretty snares are spread for me in vain."

I know now how much I wronged that gentle heart by deeming it capable of harbouring such base and contemptible impulses. I knew it that very night when I tumbled, feverish and ashamed, on my bed in Blue Anchor Lane, and even now I bow my head and blush when I recall that ungenerous moment wherein I assigned so unworthy a spirit a dwelling-place in the pure bosom of Alys Brydonne.



## CHAPTER XIX

I WAS greatly rejoiced on the following day when my Lord bade me attend him to the Castle, and better pleased when we arrived there on receiving further orders to await him in the covered gallery. I turned my eyes in every direction for a glimpse of Alys, all the while conning over the pretty compliments I should pay her in reparation for the wrong done her in secret, but the shadows drew out long and ghostly on the Baillie, the sun slipped down behind Southampton Water, and neither she nor her companion appeared.

Sir John came forth from the banquet hall an hour before curfew, and on our way to Blue Anchor Lane remarked casually that the fleet sailed on the second of July, whereat my heart sank within me, for this was the last night of June, and it seemed as if I was like to go away without exchanging one word of farewell with my mistress.

Next morning I stole out to the western battlements in the hope of meeting her once more. I loitered about like a lost ghost until the King entered the covered way leaning on Harry Hood's arm in a very familiar fashion, and engaged in earnest talk with his favourite, wherefore I did not dare to linger there any longer, and so slunk away, feeling very miserable and crestfallen. I wandered down to Bugle Street and, as I felt I must confide in

some one, poured the whole of my troubles into the unsympathetic ears of Bevis. He laughed grimly, and then proceeded to rake out his fire very deliberately.

"Do you remember what I said to you some months before in Cheapside?" said he, pausing for a moment with his tongs in the air. "No? Well, here is my advice again, Guy, and see you take it to your heart this time. Disabuse your mind of the old lie as to there being any grace or gratitude in woman and, above all, have no trade in affection with these gilt jades of the Court, whose sole pastime is to make a plaything of the heart of an honest lad like yourself."

I answered I know not what, for I was half mad with him as well as myself, but the armourer only laughed provokingly.

"She spoke you fair the other day, quotha!" said he scornfully. "Pooh! she will slap your face to-day with as fair a grace and would eat your heart to-morrow, if it was candied and sweet enow. Come, Guy, do not let such a trifle as a woman come between two friends. Shake hands and come with me for a sail upon Southampton Water, and I warrant that a sight of the big ships, and the sweet sea-breeze shall blow these silly cobwebs out of your head within an hour."

I assented dolefully, and when Bevis had changed his leather apron and workaday garments for a smart blue jerkin and hose, we went forth from the Water Gate and sought a shallop from a boatman on the pier.

"A silver sixpence, my masters," said he with the air of one who knew his power, "and cheap at the money. It is the only boat in Southampton, inasmuch as all the rest are pressed into the King's service for the embarkment to-morrow, and the next customer who wants to board the fleet must needs strip and swim for it. Is it a bargain, gentles?"

We agreed to take the shallop at the rogue's figure though it was almost the full purchasing value of it, so I went with him to fetch the oars from his house hard by the walls, and left Bevis to bail out what water was rocking about in its bilge.

On my return I found one of the Royal pages, all aflutter with silk and ribbons, standing on the pier in company with two ladies. The page was speaking in imperious tones of anger to Bevis, but the armourer sat fast in the boat with his arms folded on his broad chest, and regarded him in silent but contemptuous wrath until I drew near, when he delivered himself in this fashion—

"Here cometh the captain of this craft," said he between his teeth, "and if he, out of his courtesy, chooses to give you and your company a passage out to the fleet, well and good. If he is unwilling to take you, and you still persist in threatening me, I warn you, my dainty minion, that I shall quoit you, Royal cypher, silk ribbons and all, into Southampton Water, and dry you off afterwards with an oaken towel."

The ladies turned to me in some distress, but my own heart leaped joyfully, for one of them was the mistress of my secret love, and the other was Lady Marion. I doffed my cap and asked them in a low voice how I could serve them, all the while dreading that my comrade's rough manners had given them offence, but there was no indication of anger in the sweet face that encountered mine.

"We want so much to be put on board that great cogg yonder," said Alys smiling, and indicating one of the ships about a couple of bowshots off, "but as we find that you are the owner of all the shipping in Southampton that has not been pressed, we are fain to entreat you to afford us a passage."

The sea-breeze which set her robe of apple-green a fluttering about her also lent a flush to her cheek and a light to her eyes that made me think I had never seen her look so fair and dainty, and for a moment or two I could not find my voice. The hopeless prospects of mine own life, the devouring hunger of my love and the witching spell of her beauty so possessed me just then that I felt that I would have cheerfully knelt down for the headman's stroke an hour hence if I could have thereby purchased her love for even that brief season.

I answered very earnestly that I was at her commands in all things, and spreading my cloak about the stern, begged her and her companion to be seated. They suffered me to lift them into the boat, not without one or two little screams on their part, and some half-laughing fears that we should all be drowned, and when the page and I had taken our places beside them, Bevis shipped the oars, and pulled lustily across the joyous water.

At first I addressed my conversation to Alys alone, but to my amazement she suddenly dropped her frank and gracious manners, and answered me in short, chilling sentences. I strove hard to interest her, racking my dull brains to discover fresh subjects to engage her attention, but she waxed all the colder notwithstanding my efforts and presently she turned her head from me altogether, and fixed her gaze abroad on that quarter that was farthest from me. Then all my amazement turned to indignation.

"A murrain on you for a pretty piece of stone carving," thought I angrily; "if your ladyship does not care to give even a civil answer to my poor speeches I shall e'en devote myself to your companion."

Accordingly I addressed myself to the other maid of honour, and succeeded so well in amusing her and

salving mine own wounded vanity at the same time that I had recovered my wonted cheerfulness by the time we arrived at the great cogg.

There was evidently some gay revel afoot on this particular ship, for the yards were decorated with flowers and banners, the decks were crowded with gaily-dressed knights and ladies, and the sounds of rebecs and lutes came across the water, mingled with light-hearted laughter.

The page climbed up first, but not before Bevis had contrived to splash his fine clothes with a dexterous turn of his oar. The dripping butterfly turned to assist the ladies up the side, at the same time darting a black look at my companion, who grinned wickedly at me, and I must confess that I was so wildly jealous of this poor boy and his gaudy appointments that I could scarcely restrain a chuckle of satisfaction. Before I resigned the two maids of honour to his care I asked if I might return in the evening and land them: but Alys thanked me coldly for the service we had already rendered her party and begged us not to spoil our day's pleasure by waiting for them, as they purposed returning in one of the Royal barges. As this speech seemed to partake more of the nature of a command than a request, I bowed my head sorrowfully and bade Bevis push off.

My companion pulled steadily for a mile or so without venturing to address a word to me and I, for my part, sat silent and miserable. Suddenly he stopped rowing and, leaning his arms upon the oars, bent forward and regarded me with a curious expression in his eyes. I suppose my thoughts were patent in my face, for as I met his steady gaze, which was fast ripening into a grin, I flushed like a girl.

"Comrade," said he archly, "the damsel is very

sweet and fair, as far as women go, and I am sure that she is very much in love with you."

"Dolt," said I testily, for I was more than angry to think that he should so misunderstand my passion, "the dark young lady who was so gracious is nothing to me——"

"I never said she was," replied Bevis coolly, "I knew very well it was the other damsel—she of the apple-green robe whom you imagine you are in love with."

"Imagine!" I cried out passionately, "I would risk my life for her love if she did not freeze my heart and set it on fire by turns according as the whim possesses her—but, thank Heaven, I shall be beyond the witchery of her inconstant moods to-morrow and I pray I may never see her again."

Bevis pulled easily a little distance and hummed a couple of lines of that ballad I had heard him sing on the day we first met in Cheapside.

"I know not any ladye deare  
That's fit to marry me."

"So said King Estmere, too," said he thoughtfully, "but then, poor gentleman, he changed his mind afterwards; and speaking of King Estmere, comrade, I cannot help seeing a marvellous resemblance between him and you."

I stared at my companion and asked him how I resembled the hero of his favourite ballad.

"He was a fool," replied Bevis cheerfully, "and so are you."

He unshipped his oars, clapped one hand on my knee and looked me in the face gravely.

"Guy Engledew," said he very slowly, "you can turn

a very good rivet, wear good clothes with a good grace, and break a lance or a man's skull with most admirable dexterity; but give me leave to tell you that in one respect you are singularly deficient in what is so necessary to win a woman."

I very humbly confessed that I owned a dearth of many accomplishments, and begged him to tell me what one was so necessary to my happiness.

"Common sense," said my blunt friend curtly and contemptuously. "The common sense of your own horse or dog. Why, man, have you no discernment? Did you not mark that only one of the two girls looked startled when you came upon them at the Water Gate? Did you not observe how her eyes brightened and her bosom fluttered beneath her bodice when you greeted her? Did you not see how her cheek flushed when you said the most ordinary words of civility?"

"But," said I hopelessly, "she spake me so fair at first and then grew suddenly so cold and distant without my having given her any cause of offence."

Bevis laughed scornfully and turned down the sleeves of his jerkin.

"Aye," said he, "and the less you spake to her the less she liked it. Did you mark? No! how in Heaven's name could such a mole mark such trifles—how tightly she closed her mouth, how she tapped her little red shoe on the bottom of the boat and snapped at that poor popinjay of a page for speaking to her while you were paying courtly compliments to the merry lady with the dark hair?"

"Then why, in the name of reason," I asked, "was she so froward? Why would she not vouchsafe me a look or a word after we met, and so leave me no other resource but to address myself to her companion?"

"Because, poor girl, she was aware that, despite her

crafty training, she had betrayed herself in that unguarded moment when she welcomed you," replied my companion, "and so endeavoured, as women will, to conceal the secret she had laid bare to your goggle eyes. Oh Guy! Guy! Guy! if one of your years expects a maid to proclaim her love at the market cross to the undersong of four trumpeters I should rede his withdrawal to your precious Abbey of Torre, for the ways of this world are manifestly beyond his ken."

"Bevis," I said very solemnly, "you have already been the instrument of saving my life, and my life is at your service in return, but teach me the art of gauging a woman's feelings and I will be your bedesman, living and dead."

He laughed easily, and crept aft to the seat beside me.

"Seek a woman's secret in her eyes," said he, advancing his lips close to my ear, and looking at me in a cunning way through his half-closed lids. "Regard not the set speech her lips may utter, inasmuch as all women are liars by instinct—but look in her eyes, Guy, and, if she loves you, you will find her answer there as clear as the stars on a lake at midnight. But enough of this prattle of petticoats; I am weary of rowing and your moonsick fancies alike, so take the oars for a space and I shall steer."

I rowed about among the ships until sunset, and, on the way back to the Water Gate, lingered as long as I dared in the neighbourhood of the great cogg, whence the sound of music and laughter still came. I could not tarry after sunset, inasmuch as Sir John required my services at a very early hour the following morning, and so was compelled to run up the boat and part from Bevis shortly after the sun went down.

Andrew Privett roused me about four hours before



daybreak and, early as it was, I found the inn was ablaze with the light of torches, and bustling with life. I hastily clothed myself, waked my Lord and, whilst assisting him to dress and arm, received his instructions anent the disposal of his baggage and the shipment of the horses.

He gave me the registered number of the creyer appointed to convey him and fifty of his chosen lances, then waiting in Saint Michael's Square, hard by, impressed me with the necessity of getting them on board speedily, and without tarrying for himself, as his presence was required elsewhere by the Prince, and, lastly, bade me display his banner from the stern as soon as we took our place in the fleet so that we should have no difficulty in knowing what ship to direct his own boatmen to row to.

By the time I had Sir John's apparel packed, and his two horses saddled, it was almost sunrise, so, without waiting to delay for breakfast, I hurried to the square, which I found densely packed with men-at-arms hailing from every quarter of England. They were all armed cap-à-pie, and stood by their horses' sides ready to mount in orderly lines, each body under the banner of its Lord ; but notwithstanding their great numbers, there was no confusion in the manner wherein they embarked, for Harry Hood stood at the head of the column, roll-book in hand, and regulated the departure of each body with admirable speed and coolness.

We men of Dunster, being placed some ranks from the front, were not so fortunate as those who chanced to be before us, inasmuch as when it came to our turn to march off the Welsh and Irish aids passed through the square on their way to the ships, and so we were compelled to stand by for nearly three hours ere they left the road clear for our passage. Scarcely had the

barbarous sounds of the Irish war pipes died away when a sailor came running up to Henry Hood and held some brief parley with him, whereupon the ship-master called out in a loud voice—

“Sixty lances, two squires, and sixty-four horses of John, Lord d’Mohun, the creyer *Appleblossom* number two hundred and forty-two.”

Our sixty men-at-arms, Andrew and myself, leaped up gladly into our saddles and set off down the street ; but just as we reached the head of Watergate Lane we were obliged to pull up and wait for another weary hour while a body of Huntingdon archers tramped down before us, all the while singing lustily—

“Now Robin was a bold outlaw,  
And eke of noble birth ;  
A better archer none have seen  
Since he walked forth on earth.”

The doors of the Water Gate were wide open, and beyond the arch, as through a frame, I could see the ships lying close inshore. The upper part of the Tower was crowded with gaily-dressed ladies, and many fair faces were turned curiously in our direction ; but I had no eyes for anything but the dancing ships on Southampton Water, and the green-coated archers who waded boldly out to them, still singing carelessly, but nevertheless holding their bows and quivers high above their heads.

When the last of the archers had embarked and their ship had swung clear, we were permitted to go forward. Inasmuch as I bore the banner of Sir John, I led the party, and accordingly rode on ahead, with my companions clattering and sliding a couple of horses’ lengths behind me.

Now there are rows of square murdering-holes

through the arch of the Water Gate into the chamber above, from whence arrows or other missiles could be discharged on any foes who might succeed in forcing the outer doors, and as I passed beneath the arch the point of the banner-spear happened to grate against the roof, whereat I glanced up in an involuntary fashion as I lowered my hand, and so perceived a little hand with several jewels sparkling on its slender fingers, thrust through one of these square oylets.

At the same moment a glove dropped lightly on my saddle-bow from above. I caught it eagerly with my bridle-hand ere it could slip to the ground, and recognised it at once. It was the little grey glove, embroidered on the back with tiny seed-pearls, which Alys had drawn off her hand on that day when she had offered it so coldly to my lips at Westminster.

While our frightened horses were being slowly put on board the creyer one by one, I bound the little grey glove to the side of my helmet, and then eagerly scanned the many pretty faces on the Water Gate in search of Alys. But I looked in vain among that nose-gay of beautiful women for the flower-like face of my mistress. I went on board the last of all, and when the creyer moved slowly under a small storm-sail to her place in the far-off fleet I never took my gaze from the Water Gate for a minute, although I was well aware that it was impossible to recognise any one on it at the distance we lay from the shore.

About three hours before noon the last man-at-arms and archer was embarked, and, a little while after Lord d'Mohun came on board the *Appleblossom*, the Royal Standard was hoisted at the masthead of the King's ship.

It was the signal to weigh anchor, and the sailor-men of Southampton proved to be no laggards in the way

they obeyed the command. A mighty cheer arose from that great company of forty thousand throats when we swung slowly southward before a steady breeze off the land, and as the towers of Southampton appeared to recede from my gaze I thought I saw an apple-green robe and veil flutter above the Water Gate ; but I cannot say whether it was fact or fancy, for the sun or something else just then happened to be in mine eyes.

## CHAPTER XX

ALL day and that night the fleet, spread out in a great crescent formation, ran along before a steady following wind, steering to the south and westward; but, early next morning, the King's ship, which directed the course in front, suddenly turned to the east.

"What can this sudden change mean?" said Lord d'Mohun irritably. "This is not the course for Bordeaux, master mariner. For Normandy, say ye? Well, put over the helm in the devil's name, then. Who knows, though, it is not for the best, for after all we shall meet the Frenchmen the sooner."

There was apparently some confusion also among the other ships about the changed course, but finally the whole fleet once more resumed its original formation.

That afternoon we came to land, and the archers having been first disembarked, we men-at-arms followed soon after with our horses. When the tents, stores, and bombards were landed, pavilions were put up quickly, the horses were picketed head and heel in four lines, a body of light horsemen were sent out far in advance, and strong guards were posted at each corner of the camp.

We lay there two days, during which time the archers and men-at-arms looked carefully to their wea-

pons and armour, while we squires and pages were fully occupied in seeing to the armour of our masters as well as our own, and it was during this time that I found the benefit of the lessons I had received from old Hal at King's Guard.

On the third day after landing the army was formed in three great divisions. The van was commanded by the Prince, and with him rode the Earl of Warwick, Sir John Chandos, and my Lord d'Mohun. His division was composed of one thousand men-at-arms (amongst which were my Lord's lances) two thousand archers from Huntingdon, Lincoln, and Cheshire, and two thousand of the Irish and Welsh kerns. The second division, commanded by the King in person, consisted of two thousand men-at-arms, three thousand archers from Kent and the Midlands, and the remainder of the Welsh and Irish. The third division, commanded by the Earls of Northampton and Arundel, was composed of one thousand men-at-arms and twelve thousand archers from the North.

In this order we advanced slowly through Normandy, with the Welsh and Irish spread out in a cloud before our van. These savage warriors were instructed to fire all buildings and destroy everything in the shape of corn and fodder that lay in our line of march, and they carried out their orders with a wanton cruelty which made my heart sore for the unhappy folk through whose country we passed.

Our road to Barfleur and Saint Lô lay through the fairest land I had ever looked on, but each day's march of our army through it was like the passage of the Destroying Angel in the Holy Writings.

From our camping ground each night we could see a thousand fires which marked the way we had come that day, and each morning we set forth we left a blackened

desert behind and carried the same devilish trail of fire and destruction with us as we resumed our march.

We reached Caen about three weeks after disembarking, and this was the first place where we met with any show of resistance. Up to then the only armed men we encountered were small bodies of light horsemen who hovered far in front of our van, and fell back when any of our men-at-arms were detached against them.

After the fall of Caen we came to Rouen, where we found the bridge and town so strongly guarded that we were obliged to turn south and seek some other passage higher up the river ; but the terrors which our march inspired had, however, preceded us, and we found bridge after bridge had been destroyed before our banners were two days' march from them.

It was August by the time we reached Poissy, where we halted for some days, and the rumour passed current amongst the younger men-at-arms that the King proposed to attack Paris, but the older and more experienced soldiers shook their heads at the report. Whatever plans the King had originally laid I never knew, but, after we had lain at Poissy for three days, he suddenly gave orders for the vanguard and main body to set to work and build a spar bridge across the Seine. It was a heavy task, and the work, which was pushed on rapidly by constant shifts of fresh gangs of men, went on unceasingly night and day.

During the time we wrought at the bridge, our light horsemen were pushed out as far to the south as they dared venture ; and each day they brought us in news which, at first vague and hearsay, eventually became alarming certainty that Philip of Valois, with an immense army, was pressing forward on our track.

Our scouts reported that the French exceeded the

immense number of two hundred thousand men ; though I believe now that the figures were greatly exaggerated, and, in a verity, they did not exceed one half that count, still, taking that number, the odds against us were immense.

The King seemed to take hardly any rest, for I saw him at all hours of the night and day either supervising the building of the bridge or holding hurried counsel with the Earls of Northampton and Warwick, who appeared to take as little repose as their Royal master.

All day long, and at irregular times at night, hot and miry horsemen spurred into our camp, and, according to the King's orders, were immediately brought to him, whether he was at the bridge encouraging the workmen or lying down in his tent for a few hours' hastily snatched rest.

At length the bridge was completed, and I observed the King's worn face assume a triumphant look as, sitting on his horse at the further end of the bridge, he watched us pass over and commence our march to the north.

Although we had so far succeeded in eluding the French, we were by no means safe, because, on the day we crossed the Seine, Philip's overwhelming force was three days' march in our rear, and the country before us was already up in arms. The French forces we now met, knowing that we were being closely followed, were bolder than those we had hitherto met, and two days after we set out on our march northward our van encountered a strong force from Amiens, who stood in our path as though they would dispute our passage. Though they greatly exceeded our division, the Prince decided on engaging them, and, with that end in view, instructed us up in attack formation. It was my first experience in battle, and, though it was but a small en-



gagement, I am not likely to forget the circumstances connected with it.

The French drew near our men, who stood grim and silent ; and while our foemen were either debating upon the formation they would attack us in, or the ransoms they would ask for our bodies, our archers stepped forward and let slip six flights of arrows into the thick of them.

Before they had recovered from the confusion which our archers had caused among them, the Prince, riding out in front of his knights and men-at-arms, cried out joyously—

“Advance banners and upon them, gentlemen, in the name of God and Saint George.”

We couched our lances, and advancing at first in a steady trot, gradually increased our horses' pace to full gallop as we closed with them, and before the shock of our charge the Frenchmen broke and flew like chaff in a gale.

As they sped away in every direction the Prince looked wistfully after the flying enemy and said to my master—

“They will form again to do us hurt later on, Sir John, but we must e'en let them go as we can neither spare time nor men to follow them, so bid the trumpets blow and recall our horsemen.”

In the charge I had borne a young French knight out of the saddle, and returning to the spot where I had unhorsed him, found him lying where he had fallen with his horse quietly cropping the grass beside him.

As he was breathing I dismounted, and unlacing his helmet, offered him a cup of wine, but he shook his head.

On my asking if there was aught I could do for him he shook his head a second time and laughed mirthlessly.

"You are a good lance, Sir Englisher," said he faintly, "and I fear you have held your point to-day too true to be of much service to me in this world. By the laws of chivalry my horse and arms are yours. Be good to my poor steed, Bayard, for he hath fed from my hand for many a long day, and I have taught him all the good habits and pretty tricks he knows, and I love him dearly. Treat him well, Englishman, and he will not leave you, even when you are lying as low as I do now."

I very gladly exchanged my saddle to the back of the young Frenchman's steed, which was a beautiful animal, and, leaving my late foeman propped up on his saddle, rejoined my comrades.

We resumed our march immediately after this engagement, and hurried on for the next four days at a rate that almost resembled a flight—and in good sooth we had reason to make haste.

Although the Earl of Northampton had detached a large number of his light horsemen to the rear for the purpose of destroying roads, causeways, fodder and corn, and do all that would delay the advance of our pursuers, yet nevertheless, by the time we reached the bank of the Somme, our enemies were but three days' march behind us; and to make matters worse, we found the bridge at Abbeyville too strongly guarded to hope to force a passage that way.

We lay there two precious days, during which time the Earl of Warwick and Lord d'Mohun with their horsemen rode back and forwards along the river-bank in vain search of a ford.

During those two days of anxiety we rode each day into the water as far as we dared at various points of the river, in hopes of coming on some place shallow enough to permit men on foot wading across. We would occasionally come on a place which gave promise of being

fordable for some little distance, and when we were in hopes that we had discovered such a wished-for spot, our horses would go floundering out of their depths, and we would be obliged to swim for our lives ; each day we were obliged to return, wet and sullen, to camp without having found a crossing, and each day we heard fresh stories of the numbers and the nearness of the French.

Late on the evening of the second day I saw the King and Lord d'Mohun go forth on foot, accompanied by a clownish-looking archer, and take the road leading to the river.

I lay down in my wet clothes at the entrance of my master's tent, and, worn out with exhaustion, fell into a troubled sleep, out of which I was awakened in an hour or two by some one stumbling over my body. I started up with my hand on my dagger, and cried out, "Who is that?" and heard Lord d'Mohun's voice answer—

"Lights, boy, and fetch mine armour quickly."

When I lit the lamp, I saw that his doublet and hose were dripping with water, and he appeared to be greatly agitated. I offered to open his mails for a change of clothing, but he answered impatiently—

"No, no, Guy! I have no time for such trifles. Quick, lad! Buckle on my harness."

I put on his armour over his soaking clothes by the flickering light of the oil-lamp, expecting to hear the call to arms go throughout the camp at any moment ; and when I had buckled the last strap, he bade me arm likewise and saddle both his and my own horse.

When he was in the saddle he set off towards the river as fast as the darkness would permit, and, following him down to a spot where the river broadened, I saw two men waist deep in the water, wading towards

us in the uncertain light. One of them cried out joyously in the well-known voice of the King—

“The water is falling, Sir John, and half way across I can see already the white stones this good fellow spake about awhile ago.”

The King was soaked through and through, and my master earnestly begged him to return and change his clothes ; but he only laughed merrily, and said he had often suffered worse wettings for less profit, and that he would remain where he was until the scouts, gone forth with the Earl of Warwick, should return.

He pointed out to my Lord a long row of smouldering fires on the opposite bank, and bade him mark them well.

“Since you left me, Sir John,” said he gleefully, “this honest soldier of Warwick’s has found out that the Frenchmen yonder, who are watching this ford of the Blanche Tache, number twelve thousand bows and spears under the Sieur Godemar du Fay ; they are all brimful of fight, and, by Saint George, I do not think we are like to disappoint them before many hours are over.”

As he spoke the Earl of Warwick, followed by two horsemen, rode up.

“Sire,” said he, dismounting, “I have myself ridden round the French camp, which is barely two leagues off, and can personally vouch that our former scouts’ reports have not exaggerated the numbers of Philip’s powers. His camp-fires blaze two leagues in length, and reach from one side of the sky-line to the other, and, from the busy figures I saw flitting about betwixt the tents and fires, I doubt not but they have some move towards us ere daybreak.”

“Say you so, cousin ?” said the King quickly. “Then we shall cheat them of their fair prize ere morning

come. Tell me, good fellow," said he to the soldier, "what time you think the water will be low enough to let a man pass over, wading knee-deep?"

The man stepped back into the water, struggled out into the middle, and returned with the news that the water would be about three feet deep over the Blanche Tache within an hour.

"I shall add another hundred gold marks to the guerdon I have already promised thee, my good fellow, for that news," cried the King joyfully. "Warwick, you to the Prince, and bid his trumpets sound to horse; d'Mohun, spur to Northampton and tell him to get his men under arms and to detach a goodly company to cover the rear while we cross. I myself shall take your squire's horse and rouse my own division. Now, God and Saint George be praised for this night of grace! Ha! my worthy cousin of Valois, 'tis true you have drawn the stag into the wood, and now is the time to learn this little rule of woodcraft: 'Tis one thing to have the cordon around the quarry and another thing to have it caged!"

## CHAPTER XXI

THE trumpets of the three divisions blew almost at the same time, and men-at-arms and archers took up their places quickly and silently. It was about an hour after midnight, the stars shone brightly overhead, and the stillness of the warm summer night was only jarred by the occasional champ and clank of an impatient horse, or the jingle of armour here and there as some restless man-at-arms or archer shifted his position.

At the first faint glimpse of light, while the stars were yet undimmed in the sky, the word was received from the King to attempt the ford of the Blanche Tache ; and we men-at-arms of the van, under the leadership of the Prince in person, plashed eagerly through the water, which was barely half way up to our horses' knees.

We had scarcely formed in line on the opposite side, when the Welsh and Irish dashed in and quickly made their way across, being followed in turn by the archers of Cheshire and Huntingdon.

The camp-fires of the French were still smouldering and their camp unroused when we reached the northern bank of the river ; and it was not until the Prince had formed up his division in line of battle, that it seemed to occur to them it was time for them to oppose our passage. Then there was a great sounding of trumpets, and, from where we were, we could see horses being hastily saddled and much running to and fro.

The Prince and his knights appeared to hold a brief council, and then turning round, he shouted—

“Forward, my merry archers all! Advance, banners, in the names of God and Saint George!”

When within two or three bowshots of the French camp, a number of their knights came galloping down upon us, with the apparent intention of covering their companions until they were marshalled, but our archers poured four or five flights of heavy, bearing arrows among them, bringing them down in dozens; while the remainder of them were hanging irresolutely in their charge, the Prince led us through them, like a whirlwind, right into the heart of their disordered camp, where we immediately flung away our useless lances, and, drawing our swords, laid about us without mercy.

While we were engaged in preventing the disordered Frenchmen from rallying, the archers, in company with the Welsh and Irish, came panting up the hill, and in a few minutes their swords, battle-axes, and murderous brown knives completed the rout of the enemy, who fled in every direction, leaving the ground covered with dead and dying.

By the time we were once more formed up, the King's division had almost crossed, and, in another hour, as the last man of the Earl of Northampton's battle had passed over, we saw the vast army of the French moving slowly across the plain towards the river.

Their front, bristling with spears and fluttering with banners, extended for miles, and resembled some monstrous shining serpent wriggling slowly along, but we now felt we could regard their approach with calm courage, as the very size of their immense powers would hinder their crossing before we had made preparations for our defence.

We accordingly camped a few miles further on, and,

though we felt assured that the French could not attack us that night, nevertheless we posted strong guards about our camp, and advanced our light horsemen out in every direction about it.

Next morning we were all astir early, and Sir John, bidding me saddle our horses and accompany him, rode to the Castle of La Broye, where the King had passed the night, and indeed it was a well-earned rest, for he had scarcely slept out of his clothes for close on a week.

I remained at the gate with four or five other squires, and presently the King came forth accompanied by the Prince, the Earls of Warwick, Northampton, Bolingbroke, my master, and Sir John Chandos. They mounted their horses and rode some miles into the country, the King riding alone in front, the Prince and the remainder of the party following behind in profound silence. The King led the way along the road for a while, and then after a mile or so took to the fields; several times he stopped and asked some question of the Earl of Warwick, and then rode forward in silence as before.

At length, on his coming to a little hill with a windmill on top, he rode to the summit and, pulling up his horse, scanned the country around him keenly. Pointing to a little village just visible on the northern skyline, he asked the Earl of Warwick what it was named. The Earl, with a bow, replied it was the village of Creçy.

"Then," said the King with decision, "here, on my mother's heritage, and on the side of this little hill, shall I try conclusions with my cousin, Philip of Valois. You, my Cousin Warwick, with my Lord d'Mohun and Sir John Chandos, shall keep the right with the Prince and his battle. Your right flank shall rest on yonder



wood, and your front look down the hill. You, my Lord Earl," said he to the Earl of Northampton, pointing to a little river that wound its way to the left of the hill, "shall keep that flank with yonder small stream on your left, and the front of your battle a few yards in rear of that deep ditch. I myself shall hold the centre and reserve."

"The ground is but a poor one for the free career of horsemen, Sire," said Sir John Chandos, with a dissatisfied look at the rough ground at the foot of the hill, "and, methinks, cavalry must needs travel warily over it."

"Yes, Sir John, said the King sharply, "and to that end I chose it, with a view to the greater discomfort of my Cousin Philip's horsemen. Our fight must be fought on foot, with sword and bow, as our handful of knights and men-at-arms is but a poor one to the ten that Philip can throw against us; therefore the skill of our English bowmen, and your own steady control of them, must make up for our lack of numbers, as it has often done for merry England in the past, as it must now, and as it will again, I do not doubt, in future unequal fights. And now, gentlemen, let us lead our divisions to the separate posts I have allotted you, and, when it pleases our foemen to come upon us, we will face them with steadfast hearts and leave the issue to the God of Battles."

That morning we took up such position along the base of the hill as the King had pointed out to his knights in the earlier part of the day, and, the horses and baggage having been sent to the rear of the wind-mill, the knights took post with us men-at-arms immediately behind the archers who formed the front rank.

We waited all day for the approach of the French,

but night came upon us without a single hostile spear or helmet appearing, so we laid down to sleep dressed and armed on the spot we were posted.

Next morning our scouts came in with the news that the French were on the move, and by midday we saw their great army coming slowly forward across the plain.

The King, mounted on his white Arab, and armed completely with the exception of his helmet, rode slowly down the lines and stopped for a moment before the archers of the Prince's battle.

"Sit down and rest yourselves, my merry men," said he cheerily, "and eat and drink a cup, for it is ill work fighting on an empty stomach. Sit down, lads, ye have plenty of time before ye, inasmuch as our foemen are too busy making their wills just now to think of us."

And, in sooth, it seemed there was some ill work going on among the French, for when they were as yet a long distance off, one part in front halted and the remainder, still continuing to press forward with a vast amount of noisy shouting, threw the whole great army into confusion.

While the French were slowly assuming something like order, we men-at-arms, standing in square formation behind the bowmen, could see all that went on in front, as our archer comrades, following the King's advice, continued to sit on the ground with their cased bows and swords beside them.

Hal Panton, who was standing close by, nudged me and pointed to the sky. "See that thunder-cloud coming up from the south, Guy," said he. "I fear it will break over our heads before the Frenchmen move, and if they come upon us when our bow-strings are wet, then good-night to merry England say I."

Almost as he spoke a flash of lightning came, and

was followed by a full roll of thunder, and before the sound had died away the rain fell in torrents.

Our hardy archers, accustomed to such weather, and knowing the priceless value of a dry bow-string at such a time, instead of muffling themselves in their cloaks, took them off and wrapped them as an additional protection about their cased bows ; but the Frenchmen drew their capotes over their heads and cowered down before the fury of the storm.

"Mark yonder crossbowmen in yellow jackets and hose," said Hal. "They are the famous bowmen of Genoa, but, methinks, they are little like to inflict much harm on us with their vaunted crossbows, if they do not take more care of them than they are doing now. Thanks to Saint Swithin the shower is ceasing, and it looks as if the French were intending to give us a taste of their quality."

Just as the rain ceased the evening sun came out behind our right shoulders and shone hot and bright upon our soaking clothes and rusty armour, and at the same time the Genoese crossbowmen commenced to advance towards us in a dense but unsteady line.

"Uncase your bows, my merry men," said the Prince in a clear, ringing voice that was heard throughout his great division. "Wait for the words of your captains, then draw the silk strings to your ears and loose your shafts with a will."

Each archer rose, put his bassinet on his head, and the bracer on his arm, drew off the dripping case from his bow and strung it. Then each man selecting a dozen arrows from his quiver, laid them on the ground, and placing his left foot on them waited silent and motionless.

The Genoese, advancing with leaps and cries, suddenly halted and raised a shout. It had nothing of the deep-

chedsted ring that I have noticed the cheer of our English yeomen carries with it. It was shrill, thin and quavering, and seemed to me like the scream of a hurt woman rather than the battle shout of fighting men.

Our archers and spearmen gave back no answering shout, but stood so still and silent that they might have been so many oaken statues ; the very plumes upon the helmets of our knights, and the banners above our heads hung wet, dripping, and without a flutter. The Genoese, advancing about a hundred yards, stopped, and with another shriek let loose a flight of crossbow bolts, a few of which whistled into the little group around Lord d'Mohun's standard, and with a gasp and a groan my poor old comrade, Hal Panton, reeled beside me. I caught him before he reached the ground, but one hurried look in his face showed me he was dead before my arms clasped him round the body, so I laid him down upon the ground, covered his face with my cloak, and rose with the lust of blood in my heart, and a mad desire to rush out and fall upon the nearest of the Genoese.

I remember now how amazed I was just then to see how calm all my comrades were and, taking from their coolness a share of steadfastness which I did not possess myself, looked forth and saw that the Genoese, taking courage from the silence of our archers, had advanced another few yards and were preparing to shoot again. I wondered, with a burning thirst in my soul to see my old friend avenged, why the Prince did not give the command to shoot, and saw the captains of the different bodies of archers look back at him with an inquiring look on their faces, and then to my fierce joy I observed him nod briefly.

Then each archer, taking one pace forward, to clear his foot of the arrows on the ground, stooped and fitted

one to his string; and while the air was full of the twang of the bowstrings and the whistling of the flying shafts, six flights fell like a winter hailstorm among the yellow-coated crossbowmen.

Each archer ceased as soon as he had shot his six, remaining motionless as before, and looking between their shoulders I saw the ground was covered, as thickly as leaves on a forest floor in autumn-tide, with screaming, writhing bodies clad in yellow, while the remainder of their companions were flying southward like sheep, cutting their bowstrings and casting away their weapons as they ran.

As the Genoese fled I saw that which perhaps sowed the seed of the unconquerable hate I confess I bear to Frenchmen. For though in peace they be a nation the most sprightly, courteous, and agreeable folk a stranger could wish to meet withal, yet defeat in war will turn them into the most cruel and inhuman beings that ever wreaked the bitterness of their wounded vanity upon the helpless and defenceless.

No sooner did the Italians turn and fly, when I saw a vast line of mail-clad horsemen, who were advancing as I thought to their help, hand their lances to the rank behind them and draw their swords; then when the wretched men came flying into their ranks, I saw the French sword blades rising and falling amongst them as swift as the sails of a windmill.

That scene of butchery made my heart hot to be laying into the brutes in front. The unfortunate Genoese had fought as well as they knew how. They were unable to withstand the superiority of our cloth-yard shafts and, having done their *devoir*, fled to meet the death they avoided at the murderous hands of their own allies.

They were destined to be revenged shortly afterwards

—for as soon as the French horsemen were weary of their cowardly work they sheathed their swords and resuming their lances, advanced in one splendid line, which on drawing near to us, separated into two divisions, one bearing down upon the Earl of Northampton's wing, the other coming straight for us.

When they were a long bowshot off, the Prince again gave the signal to commence, and once more the air about us was humming with the sound of the throbbing bowstrings and the sharper singing of the cloth-yard shafts.

Although falling banners, horses, and riders marked the havoc our arrows were playing among them, the Frenchmen came gallantly up the hill, but their maddened horses and the steady hail of arrows checked the speed and ardour of their charge, and when they reached us it was only to recoil from our levelled lance points; for on the Prince's signal, we men-at-arms, stepping up beside our archer comrades, presented our spears that formed a barrier which the Frenchmen vainly endeavoured to break down.

A bombard close beside me suddenly exploded its devilish charge, and I saw a French knight and his horse, who happened to be before it, raised aloft in the air and hurled into a shapeless mass as though struck by lightning.

Under cover of the thick smoke caused by the bombard, the Welsh stole out from the right and commenced to hough and stab with their long, murderous knives, while the Irish, with a wild war shout rushed out from the left and struck at the legs of the frightened horses with their great double-handed axes.

Then, while the broken remnants of the French chivalry retired slowly down the hill, a scene of the most horrid sort took place in front of our lines.

For the Welsh, catching hold of the Frenchmen, as they struggled with their dead horses, sought with the points of their knives for weak spots in their foemen's armour and slew them one by one with as much indifference as though they were sheep, and at the same time the Irish, swinging their great battle-axes, to the time of deep guttural coughs, sheared off arms and legs at every stroke.

I thought the battle was over, as it was by this time growing dusk, but another great line of horsemen forming up on the plain below showed that the French were about to make one more effort to carry the day, and we all instinctively felt that this charge was to be the cast on which Philip was staking all.

The Welsh and Irish stole back to their places, their garments reeking with the blood of man and horse which had spouted over them during their murderous work, and regarded the advancing Frenchmen with much the same look as gaze-hounds give when they see their quarry before them. The archers calmly and collectedly drew forth a fresh supply of arrows, shifted the hilts of their short swords more forward on their left thighs, and all of us set ourselves to meet the final pass of the battle which was about to come.

A knight in battered armour and covered with mud and blood came among us, and I heard him whisper to Lord d'Mohun—

"The King refuses to send aid, and says the Prince must win his spurs."

"Then may the good God aid us," said my master hoarsely, "for it is like to go hardly with us. Here they come! Now may God and our Lady keep us."

The French knights came up the hill as fast as the spur could drive their horses, and again a steady stream of shafts from our archers' bows went tinkling amongst

them. Down went horses and men as before, and those immediately behind either went down headlong over them or were obliged to check the speed of their charge by reining in their horses or riding around their fallen comrades. But, notwithstanding the deadly welcome they received, several of the Frenchmen managed to burst through our front, carried in on their dying horses by the impulse of their own rush, and for a while there was a brief *mêlée* in the rear of our archers, during which the swords and battle-axes of us men-at-arms were pretty busy.

One French knight, clad in splendid armour, succeeded in spurring his horse almost up to the Prince's standard. A ring of uplifted swords and spears closed immediately about him, and one of the Irish kerns swept the horse's foreleg away with his great axe, but the dying struggles of the poor animal cleared a space around him for a moment, and the Frenchman sprang clear and stretched out his bridle-hand to my Lord in entreaty.

"Sir John d'Mohun," he cried appealingly, "for the sake of the days gone by and the honour of your country cross swords with me."

"Yield thee! yield thee!" cried Sir John, "and I pledge thee my knightly honour that I shall obtain treatment befitting thy rank."

"I will never yield with life," answered the gallant Frenchman, swinging back his sword to deliver a cut at Andrew Privett, who was advancing to seize him, "the day goes hard with France, and I look for no better treatment than the remainder of my countrymen."

Andrew, though imperfectly acquainted with the French tongue, had no difficulty in understanding his meaning, so he guarded the blow deftly, and, closing



with his foeman, thrust the point of his strong, straight sword thrice into the bars of his helmet.

"There! there! there!" cried the Lancashireman fiercely between each thrust, "then yield thee in the fashion thou wilt then."

The Frenchman dropped helplessly backwards and crossed his hands upon his battered hauberk in the fashion of the Templars.

"Base English ploughman," he gasped faintly, "you are never like to stain your common sword with better blood, for you have slain the brother of a King," and then immediately expired.

Sir John bent across him and pushed back the visor off the disfigured face, from which the life-blood was yet gouting.

"Yes," said he, with a choke in his voice, "it is the Comte—God rest his soul! Farewell, d'Alençon, brave knight and courtly gentleman, no more gallant man than yourself has ever fallen beneath a shield. Cover his face, Guy, cover his face, I cannot bear to look upon it."

By a strange freak of chance the French King's brother had fallen almost side by side by the stiffened body of my poor old friend, Hal Panton, and when I raised one corner of the mantle wherewith I had covered my dead friend I fancied—nay, indeed at the moment I believed—that the stern old face smiled as I replaced the mantle over the two. I thought grimly that my old friend had been more than amply avenged, and, leaving the dead smith and the French Royal Prince side by side, I returned to my place among the men-at-arms.

The light was waning fast, the evening star was shining brightly in the darkening sky, and gradually night closed in without any more of our foemen appearing before us, so we had ample time to con-

template the effect of our archers' shooting, and mark how the English cloth-yard shaft had humbled the chivalry of France.

As far as eye could see the dead Frenchmen lay line behind line, like swathes in a cornfield when the reapers have been busy, and just before the Prince's division the bodies of horse and men were piled up four high in a churned-up marsh that smoked with blood.

Although the battle was over, still, owing to our small numbers, we did not dare to venture in pursuit or to leave the places where we had stood all that bloody day, and it was not till nightfall that a few of the Earl of Warwick's light horsemen mounted and stole out to seek information.

In an hour's time they returned with the welcome tidings that the remnants of the French were flying in a mad panic towards the south and east; and on receiving this news we drew up the bodies of our men who had fallen, covered them up with our mantles, and, lighting great fires along our lines, sat down to sup.

We were weary and aching, and awed by the near presence of our own dead behind us and the great ghastly heaps of the French in front, so the most of us ate and drank in silence, and when one man spoke to another it was but in a whisper.

Up at the windmill on the summit of the hill, where the King and Prince supped in company with their knights, the same sense of quiet rest was brooding. Nor jest nor song nor sound of mourning disturbed the solemn stillness, and when we lay down to sleep later on, if it were not for the great fires which blazed along our front, any one coming upon us that night would have deemed it a camp of the dead, for we lay as still in the trampled mud as the great ramparts of slain Frenchmen that strewed the ground around us.

## CHAPTER XXII

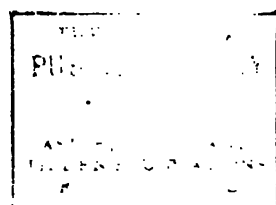
**N**EXT morning a dense fog hung over the hill and wood, so the King sent forth Sir John Chandos with eight hundred lances to range the country-side for any foemen who might happen to be lurking in our vicinity. A short distance from Creçy we fell in with a body of French who were hurrying down from the north in search of Philip's army, and charging them, without asking their leave or exchanging any other courtesies, we put them to flight in great confusion.

The few prisoners we brought back were ignorant of the events of the previous day, but when they reached our camp and saw the vast heaps of dead before it, they perceived, to their intense dismay, what a crushing blow had been dealt their country, and many of them lifted up their hands and wept for the fallen might of France.

When the fog lifted and the sun rose we set about burying our own dead. We left the Frenchmen where they had fallen, inasmuch as they were far too many to allow us to render them that office, but we took a tale of their knights, and they alone numbered close on two thousand, of whom no less than eleven, including the Count d'Alençon, were sovereign princes, the remainder being composed of the best blood in the kingdom. As to the common dead, I have heard from those who



**"THE MOST FAMOUS AND NOBLE AMONG THE DEAD."**



had good cause to know, they numbered thirty thousand, a number scarcely less than the total strength of our entire army; from which fact those Englishmen who had not the good fortune to be present on that tremendous day can judge for themselves how their kindred acquitted themselves.

The Prince, accompanied by the Earl of Warwick, Lord d'Mohun, and a French knight, who had been taken prisoner in the earlier part of the day, walked forth among the dead in order to inspect them, and the squires of the Prince and Earl, as well as myself, followed our masters dutifully over the field.

The French knight walked by the Prince's side and pointed out to him sorrowfully the most famous and noble among the dead, and presently, coming to a place where the slain lay very close together, he drew the Prince's attention to a strange and melancholy sight.

Three knights, whose white plumes proclaimed them to be Germans, lay so close together that at first we thought they and their steeds had been slain by the same flight of shafts, and had so dropped at one and the same moment. On looking closer, however, we perceived that the bridles of the three were chained so closely one to the other that dead or living they could not have been easily parted.

The slashed legs of their horses and the red stains under their throats between the joining of the tippet and the helmet-rim revealed plainly that they had yielded up their ghosts under the hands of the Welshmen; but the linked bridles and the fashion whereby they had endured death in such close company was beyond our ken, and we looked from the dead to one another, all the while marvelling greatly at the piteous sight before us.

The centre knight lay face downward, so the French-

man knelt down beside him and raised up his head gently—almost reverently. He slipped back the visor and disclosed a peaceful old face, tufted with a snow-white beard, and our hearts felt sore with pity for its fate.

"Blindness, old age, and infirmity could not deter him," said the Frenchman gravely. "It is the King of Bohemia, Sire. One of my fellow-comrades in misfortune informed me some hours back that the old man, on learning how the day was going, begged two of his knights to fasten their bridles to his and lead him where he might strike one blow at least in the thick of the battle—and so they rode forth, and so they fell, just as your Highness sees."

The Prince was deeply affected, and bending down he plucked a feather from the plume in each dead man's helmet.

"Venerable old hero," said he softly. "I pray to God that when I number as many years as thou the flame of chivalry may burn as strongly in my soul as it did in thy withered heart yesterday. Here in my cap of maintenance I brooch these feathers, and there shall I ever wear them as a spur to noble resolves and in memory of thy quenchless valour."

The following day we resumed our march in a leisurely fashion to the north, and arrived before the gates of Calais on the first of September. The King sent a summons by Sir John Chandos to the Governor, Jean de Vienne, a Burgundian knight, to render up the town; but the Governor, who proved himself to be a brave and steadfast soldier all through the affair, sent back word that he had received the ward of the town from his master, Philip of France, and into no other hands but his would he yield his charge.

The investment seemed a hopeless task, as the vast strength of the walls would have defied the strongest

battering-engines known ; and as we were unprovided with any siege-train, it appeared to us young and inexperienced squires that the raising of the leaguer would be but a matter of a few weeks, as the only effect our bombards had upon the fortifications was to knock some chips of stone off the walls and drive a few splintered holes in the great gates.

Winter set in a month after we summoned Calais, but instead of sending for a siege-train, the King resolved upon employing the more powerful weapon of starvation to reduce the town, and to that end the army was set to work to build a double line of houses for our winter lodging around it.

Although the walls and roofs of these houses were but built of wood, yet, by nailing cloth or canvas over the boards, and roofing them over with sods on the outside, we made the rooms within warm and comfortable ; and gradually these rows of houses took on the appearance of veritable streets, and there started up so many inns, taverns, and such places of entertainment that the soldiers called our quarters the New Town, which was a title it well deserved, as it held within its walls a population nearly as large as the city we were laying siege to.

In the meantime our fleet kept unceasing watch on the seaward side of the doomed city, and in consequence of this close investment the defenders, at the latter end of the second month of the siege, thrust out of the gates a thousand hapless creatures who were useless to them as a fighting force. They consisted mainly of aged men, women, and children, and though it was strongly against our interests to permit them to leave the city, the King was so much touched by their wretched condition that he ordered them to be well fed and suffered them to pass through our lines.



About this time we had glad news from England. The Scots, according to their universal custom when our forces happened to be abroad, crossed into England shortly after we landed in France and advanced into the heart of the defenceless country, laying waste all before them. However, if the Royal Lion had left his domain he had entrusted it during his absence to the care of a mate who was well worthy to share his counsel, for the Queen, at the head of a body of raw country lads and city merchants, encountered the Scots at Neville's Cross, and not only defeated their trained warriors, but took their King, David Bruce, prisoner, and lodged him in the Tower of London as a pledge for the peace of his people.

A little before Christmastide the Queen, accompanied by the Archbishop of York and a splendid train, crossed over from Dover and joined the King at New Town.

The meeting between the twain was full of tenderness, for his Majesty took his Royal partner in his arms and kissed her on the mouth and brow before us all ; and she, brave, gentle ladye, clung to him with her face glowing with mingled pride and love of him. I heard him speak to her, and I know his voice was husky, and if it was not for love of her I know not why his eyes should have been brimming over with tears just then.

"How doubly blessed am I by a bounteous Heaven," he murmured, "how doubly blessed am I. I have been given a wife who not only bore me a hero for a son, but hath also taught him in her own brave person what a heroic stem he grew from. Let joy and mirth and masquerade prevail this season, love. Let England's trumpets voice unto the world how grateful I am to God for having given thee to me—how grateful I am to

thine own sweet, winsome self for all thou hast done for England."

So Christmastide was passed joyously in New Town with feasting, music, and gay mummers; but methought our joy must have grated on the ears of the gaunt defenders of Calais as they looked hungrily from their battlements upon the wakeful ring of our sentinels and watch-fires which lay between them and plenty.

At one of these gay masquerades, wherein the King took so much delight, all the ladies of the Court appeared in little parti-coloured hoods and vizards. They mingled with much jesting and merry laughter at will among the knights and nobles, who endeavoured by many artful tricks to discover the wearers of the various disguises; for it was as much a rule of this form of mummers that the ladies should strive to conceal their identity by every cast of woman's wit as it was the aim of their partners to discover them.

Whilst I, in company with some other squires, stood at the doorway of the hall wherein this gay masque was being held, looking on at the diversions which we were not permitted to share in, a lady, wearing a blue cloak and vizard, came up and addressed me by name. She spoke in a feigned voice and walked with an assumed limp, and, I have no doubt, considered that a clumsy soldier like myself would not have penetrated her disguise; but, notwithstanding her cunning fence, I recognised Alys immediately, and my forehead glowed heart-hot for a moment and then turned ice-cold.

I happened to be holding my cap under my crossed arms, and she reached out her hand scornfully and twitched at the poor little grey glove which I had worn ever since the day I had ridden out under the Water Gate at Southampton. The colour of that beloved keepsake had faded from grey to white owing to

exposure to sun and shower, and a French sword had sheared it almost in two at Creçy, but the little monogram of seed pearls remained untouched upon the wrist, and the glove itself yet hung together notwithstanding its condition.

"Sir Squire," said she, and I fancied that her voice quivered a little, "wherefore wear that ragged favour in your cap? A proper young fellow like you should effect some more fitting badge than a faded old glove that is almost dropping to pieces. Indeed, it grieves my heart so much to witness so goodly a youth with such a laughable crest, that I shall give you a jewelled favour to wear in its place if you will give me that ragged glove and let me burn it."

"Ladye," said I very gravely, "I thank you for your generous offer, but I would not change this torn glove for the King's crown. This poor token, which you rate so lightly, I hold very holily, for it dropped on me as if from heaven, and I intend to keep it until its former owner claims it along with its present wearer for her very faithful servant."

The other squires about me smiled broadly, whereupon the lady in the blue cloak and vizard shrank back in some confusion and disappeared hastily amongst the other mummers.

I met Alys on four or five occasions after this incident. Her speech was as cold, and her manner as restrained as when I last met her in Southampton, and yet, somehow, my heart was unvisited by any of the old bitter feelings which had so tortured me the year before, for I had by this time trained myself to regard her as a flower that was far too choice to be gathered by such hands as mine, and yet not so jealously fenced about as to be shut off altogether from my humble and adoring eyes.

Winter dragged slowly through, and summer succeeded spring, and still we lay around Calais, and no help came to those within. They must have suffered the most dreadful extremities within the town, for they essayed some of the most desperate deeds whereof it has been my lot to hear. One of their ships attempted to run through our fleet, but was immediately detected and headed off ere she had cleared the harbour. The French saw they had no hope of running through the hundreds of our ships that were bearing down upon them. However, they made no attempt to return to the horrible place whence they had come, but deliberately put down their helm and ran into the nearest of our vessels, all the while thanking Heaven that their end was at hand.

The ship they ran aboard happened to be the cogg *Honeysuckle*, a favourite ship of the King, and at that moment commanded by Harry Hood. The Frenchman crushed into the streke of the *Honeysuckle* as through an egg-shell, but his own bows burst with the shock, and consequently both sank together, and out of their joint companies never a soul was saved.

The news of this disaster was brought to the King as he was on the point of going forth for a gallop in company with the Prince and Sir John. I happened to be holding my master's horse outside the Royal Pavilion when the body squire of the King approached in a very downcast manner, and I heard him relate the circumstances of this woeful engagement just as I have set them forth.

The King listened to these tidings with an ashy-white colour and his eyes staring wildly at the messenger. When his squire had made an end his Majesty sank down upon a bench with his head bowed down and a corner of his mantle drawn before his countenance, and

thus he sat for a space in an overwhelming passion of grief which neither the Prince nor my master durst venture to soothe.

When the first gust of his grief had spent itself in silent storm he sprang up trembling all over and rent his beard.

"What!" he cried. "My brave Harry drowned and my dainty ship gone? No! no! no! Say it is not true, or say at least that thou didst hear this news from a fool and I shall forgive thee, Gawaine."

The squire bent his head and laid his hand upon his heart, but spake no word in reply.

"What, true! Ah, my poor, bluff, brave Harry, I fear it is true; but comfort, my good Harry, take comfort, for you shall not be alone on your passage to the next world. Hear me, brave spirit, and you, too, kind Heaven. For every hair upon thy head, Harry Hood, shall I set a citizen of Calais dangling from its walls, for every plank of the *Honeysuckle* shall I burn a ship of the port; for every man who went down along with my ship shall I exact a life from the mariners of Calais. Take away the horses, Gawaine—take them away, I say, and you, my Lord d'Mohun, withdraw with my son the Prince, for my heart is too heavy to see company this day."

About a fortnight after the *Honeysuckle* went down, news came to us that Philip was advancing to the relief of Calais with a great power, and accordingly we busied ourselves to receive him in a befitting manner. However, after hovering for a week or two a few miles off, the Frenchman withdrew his army without any apparent reason, and thus left the town to its fate, for on the following day the Governor, Jean de Vienne, offered to surrender the charge which he could no longer maintain in the face of absolute starvation.

## CHAPTER XXIII

**I** HAVE heard that the King at first demanded an absolute render of the entire garrison and city, but the Burgundian would not yield on these terms, saying that he and his men preferred to die with arms in their hands than to have their throats slit like sheep, and the King's demands were reduced to the unconditional submission of six of the leading citizens.

A rich pavilion was put up for the King a couple of bowshots from the city gates, and there, surrounded by his knights and their squires standing behind, he awaited the final answer of the Governor.

As the hour of noon struck on the church bells within the gates of the city were thrown open, and seven gaunt, haggard men issued forth and came slowly towards the Royal Pavilion.

Six of the seven, who seemed more like spectres than men, were clad only in their shirts and walked bare-headed, with naked feet, and wore halters round their necks. The seventh, Jean de Vienne, who seemed hardly able to support his own weight, was clad in complete harness and walked, leaning on his sheathed sword.

Clinging one to the other in the weakness bred of fear and famine, they made their way feebly to the

King's feet, where the Governor laid down his sword in token of surrender, and the leader of the half-naked six, falling on his knees and begging for mercy on behalf of himself and his companions, offered the King the keys of the city.

The piteous condition of the six starved creatures who knelt so gaunt, faint and silent moved the hearts of all except the King, who looked upon them with a stern and unmoved countenance, and handing the keys to a page beside him, he said curtly—

“Boy! go fetch the headsman.”

A great chill fell upon the hearts of all, but none durst whisper to the next man what was in his mind. The starved wretches that knelt with mute mouths and bowed head seemed to be less affected than we their conquerors, for there were tears in the eyes of all save the King, who still kept his fixed on the doomed six with a glare of silent hate.

Presently one of the provost's assistants stepped into the circle, axe in hand, and planting the head of his weapon on the ground, waited his orders grimly. The King stood up and thrust his clenched hand into the bosom of his furred doublet.

“Headsman,” said he harshly, “do thy duty on the bodies of these six men.”

Each of us looked piteously at his neighbour, but no one moved, and the leader of the six knelt down meekly on the spot that the executioner indicated. Then did the brave Sir Walter Manny step forward valiantly to the King's chair, and verily it was an action that the boldest might have shirked if he could, for it is a parlous undertaking to come between the lion and his prey. He dropped upon his knee and besought the King, for the love of his own honour, not to do this cruel deed, but his master clipped him short.

"Hold thy peace, Sir Walter," cried he fiercely. "No other but thyself dare check at me so and live, and therefore I take it much to heart that thou shouldst so presume upon my love. These pirate spawn of Calais have slain thousands of my brave sailors, and I tell thee that these six must die as an example to the rest. I have sworn it, and I will fulfil mine oath, therefore, Sir Walter, hold thy peace, and thou, headsman, do thy office quickly."

Just as the King spoke these words Queen Philippa glided into the pavilion by a side entrance. She was clad in the same rose-coloured silk robe she had worn on the day whereon I met her coming forth from Mass at the Abbey of Westminster. A gold circlet, with a splendid ruby set in it, was clasped about the thick coils of her dark hair, and two beautiful sapphires twinkled in her little ears.

But neither ruby nor sapphires equalled the beauty of her tender little mouth nor the brightness of her eyes, which were shining brimful of tears of pity.

She advanced with slow and hesitating steps towards the King, whose face just then happened to be turned from her, her hands stretched out towards him, her head poised slightly to one side in an attitude of dumb pleading, her lips fluttering as though she would speak but could not. The King heard the soft rustle of her dress upon the ground, and he turned and saw her.

"Ladye," said he harshly, "this is no place for thee."

Then he turned to the headsman quickly, and bade him take away his victims elsewhere.

"No ! no !" cried the gentle creature, sinking on her knees before her Consort, and clasping his strong, brown hands in her little white ones. "Edward ! Royal husband ! For the love of God and His holy



Mother—for thine own soul's sake—have pity on these unhappy men.”

A look of anguish crossed the distorted features of the King. He endeavoured to raise her to her feet, and release her clasp upon him, but she still continued to kneel before him despite his efforts, all the while clinging to his hands and holding them close to her bosom.

“No! no! dear heart,” she sobbed, “here shall I kneel until thou dost pardon them. Oh, Edward, Edward, pity them and pity me.”

“I have sworn to Heaven,” said the King in a broken voice, “that I would avenge my Harry Hood—my brave Harry. Mine oath—mine oath, I will not be forsworn.”

“A cruel oath—a wicked oath,” cried the Queen, “and the breaking of it shall be looked upon by high Heaven as a claim for mercy for thyself, my Lord.”

He shook his head scornfully, and dragged his hands almost rudely from hers. His fair hair and beard straightened, all his anger returned, he signed impatiently to the executioner, and we all drew our breath hard, for we deemed that last piteous appeal for mercy had indeed failed like the others. However, we knew little as yet of the power which remained in those little white hands that were lifted appealingly to him.

“Dear husband,” said she, very softly and slowly, “at peril of my life have I donned harness and steel cap in order to lead thy armies at home when thou wert warring abroad. At peril of my life have I crossed the seas in order to be at thy side again. I have endured many things in secret for thy sake, Edward, and yet never asked for more than thy love in return. During all our married life I have never begged a favour, and yet, dear heart, thou hast often rated me

for so neglecting to prove thy love for me. Now, by that love which thou didst profess, I conjure thee to give me these men for the honour of the Queen of Heaven and the weal of thine own soul."

The King looked down for a moment on the sweet face that was turned up so earnestly to his. Then the tears rained down her cheeks, and we knew that Queen Philippa had fought and won her second battle that year, for the King, putting his arms about her, raised her very gently to her feet.

"Ladye," said he, in a husky voice, "I stand forsworn before the world, but I can deny thee nothing. Take these men, in God's name, and do with them what thou wilt."

The gush of joy that brimmed over in the gentle bosom of the Queen spread into the hearts of all who stood around, and from us it passed through the entire army like a great ocean wave gathering strength in its progress.

Queen Philippa's sweet manners and gentle nature had long been appreciated by even the roughest soldiers in New Town, but this crowning act of womanly intercession, even though proffered on behalf of foemen, swept all hearts tumultuously around her in the same fashion as sand is drifted about a pillar in a gale.

The greater number of our knights took on themselves vows to perform acts of chivalry for the glory of her name throughout France. We squires set our caps fiercely, slapped our sword hilts, and promised ourselves our spurs ere long, for the mere reason that we fought for such a Queen, and the remainder of the army, from the men-at-arms and archers down to the scullion boys, swore with unnecessary violence that she was an uncanonised saint, and never mentioned her name without touching the rims of their helmets or barret caps.

## CHAPTER XXIV

**B**Y the end of September, the Great Truce was signed, and in the following month the King and Queen, with all the Court and the greater part of the army, set sail for London.

I, however, to my great secret disappointment, learned from my Lord that I was to remain behind at Calais with fifty men-at-arms. Three other squires from different other levies, each with a like command to mine own, were told off to bear me company, and I promise you that there was little joy in the hearts of us four and our men-at-arms when the great fleet set out gaily for home and left us behind in garrison.

We were seldom allowed out of the Castle, and even when we did go forth had so few amusements outside the walls that, by the end of the first year we were stationed there, we rarely asked for leave to go beyond the portcullis. Time dragged on wearily with us, and so two sluggish years passed. By the end of that period we four squires had grown so heartily sick of one another's faces that we would avoid meeting our fellows, and never drew voluntarily together save at meal-times, and even then we ate and drank as silently as a company of Cistercian monks.

We would have gladly welcomed an attempt to surprise the Castle, a riot in the town, a skirmish with

some of the robber-ships of Lyons—aye, even a death among ourselves, as a cheerful break in the dull monotony of our lives. However, even garrison service sometimes brings exciting experiences to those who lie within walls and, by my fay, we ourselves had one ere we left the place.

On the last night of the second year that we lay in Calais, an event occurred which woke us all of the deadly lethargy wherein we were plunged, and gave us ample food for conversation for many a long day afterwards. Owing to the solemn truce sworn to by Philip and our King, wherein each pledged the other to abstain from making any hostile move upon what had been lost on the one side and won by the other, Calais was garrisoned by no more than our sparse command of two hundred lances, and free passage was moreover allowed in and out of the town between sunrise and sunset to all Frenchmen who had business within the walls.

The Governor of the town was Esmeric de Pavia, a noble knight of Lombardy, but the most silent and stealthy creature it has ever been my lot to meet withal.

Sometimes, when drowsing by the guard-room fire, a little cough would cause me to look up, and I would find Sir Esmeric standing behind me in his furred mantle ; then, almost before I would have time to gather my wits together to answer the commonplace question he would put, he would give me a cat-like look, and slip away as noiselessly as he had come, rubbing his lean hands one over the other as though he were washing them.

The sentinels on the turret-summits, leaning on their spearshafts and looking across the short span of leaden-coloured winter sea that separated them from their homes in merry England, could never be certain at what

moment of their lonely watch that a flutter of his furred cloak beside them would bring their hearts into their mouths. He moved like a ghost, and never seemed to sleep himself, so I warrant there were few under his command who ventured to doze on duty.

On that never-to-be-forgotten night of December, I was posting one of my sentinels after sunset upon the seaward turret when a little cough at my side made me start, and I found the Governor and his page standing beside me.

"'Tis a bitterly cold evening, Sir Squire," said he pleasantly, "and a difficult light to see aught abroad. Your eyes are younger than mine, and, therefore do me the favour of looking yonder and telling me when you see a ship coming from that direction."

I leaned my breast against the battlements and, with my head crouched down as far as I could to shelter my face from the biting winter wind, remained with my eyes fixed on the white-topped waves and mist drift, while the Lombard paced backwards and forwards stamping his feet to keep himself from freezing.

When I had strained my eyes for about an hour, I was suddenly aware of a ship's sails, which came skimming through the sea-mist like the wings of some monster bird and, rising from my stooping position, I said to the Governor—

"See, my Lord, a ship cometh."

"Can you see any flag?" said he anxiously; "any pennon or signal?"

I looked again closely and answered, "Two, my Lord, but I cannot make out in this poor light what they are."

"No matter," said he quickly. "Tell me how they are flying."

"One above the other, my Lord," I replied.

"Good! good!" he murmured to himself, rubbing

his gloved hands together. "He hath received my message and understands." Then he turned to his page. "Open that bag, boy. Bend on two flags, one above the other, to the haulyards of the flag-staff, and then hoist them up."

While the page was doing his bidding, he plucked off his furred gloves, and taking off his signet-ring gave it to me with these words—

"Bear that, as an earnest of my bidding, to the Captain of the Water Gate, that he is to admit whomsoever land from yonder ship; and when they are entered the gate, you yourself lead them up quietly into the guard-room."

I hurried down from the turret and, having given my message, waited at the open gate while I watched the dark figures of many men jump one by one from the prow of the ship and wade hastily ashore. They formed up quickly in line on the beach, and presently marched up, headed by three men. As they came nearer I saw that they were all in armour and carried sword, shield, and mace, so I stepped quickly back, but was reassured by hearing a familiar voice say in a low tone—

"Saint George for England! 'Tis I, Walter Manny, with two my knights and two hundred men-at-arms."

The party filed in quickly, and I led them up the winding stair to the guard-room, which adjoined the great banqueting hall. The three knights passed into the hall, and Sir Walter sent me away to fetch the Governor to them.

He was still on the turret steps, and when I gave him my message he nodded briefly, and sent me again to the Water Gate with orders for the Captain of the Gate to admit whatever archers should be landed from two other ships then coming close inshore. He also told me to leave instructions for the archers to form up silently in the Castle square, and there await further

orders, while I myself was to arm and return with my command of fifty lances to the guard-room.

I was full of wonder at this sudden warlike preparation, but as my training had been always to obey without questioning I performed these commands without asking the reasons for them, although I marvelled all the more when, on leading my men to the great guard-room, I observed on my way thither that strong parties of Sir Walter Manny's force were already posted in various commanding positions.

In the guard-room there still remained about ten men-at-arms, and on entering Sir Walter bade me send twenty of my command into a small room below the banquet hall, bidding them wait there until they heard a whistle blown thrice.

"There is just room," said he to one of his two knights, "for thirty or forty men here ; if they were more they would but be in the way."

The three were close to the great guard-room fire, and though the two companions of Sir Walter were much his inferiors in rank, judging by their simple armour, yet I was much surprised to see that the taller of the two unknown knights sat with his ungloved hands spread before the blaze, while Sir Walter and the other stood at either side of the fire-place ; from which I concluded that he with the ungloved hands was some rough, unpolished sailor or soldier who had been dubbed by the King for some act of great personal courage, for his indifference to, or ignorance of the higher rank of Sir Walter, seemed to point to inherent rough manners and want of proper respect and courtesy to his superiors.

We remained silent and almost without moving in the guard-room, while Sir Walter Manny by the fire-place watched the sand slowly filter through the big two-hour

glass, which was set above the chimney on a bracket as a guide to the Captain of the Guard what time to post and relieve the sentinels of his watch.

The last few grains of sand were dribbling into the lower half of the glass, when the Governor crept into the room in his stealthy fashion, and making a sign to Sir Walter Manny, passed alone into the great hall beyond the guard-room.

Sir Walter and his two knights unsheathed their swords, stole as far as the entrance of the hall and there stopped, while we ranged ourselves behind them with our drawn weapons in our hands and wonder in our hearts.

I then observed, for the first time, that the double doors connecting the guard-room with the hall had been removed, and there was nothing but a thin worn curtain between us and the room beyond.

Behind this curtain we waited like statues, hardly venturing to breathe until our pulses were quickened by hearing the creak of a door below, followed by stealthy footsteps coming up the stairs that led to the other entrance to the banquet hall.

Presently we heard voices speaking in low tones within, and then I distinguished the speech of Esmeric the Lombard, whose sharp key grew sharper each word he spoke.

"No!" said he, each word dropping from his lips like the tap of a knife-point on an anvil, "I have no time to count it now, for the stars fade and it will soon be day. And now ye want the Master Tower. Well, gentlemen of France, here it is before ye!"

With these words he plucked down the curtain, rings, pole and all, and stood before us with his arms thrown round a leathern sack from which gold crowns and rose-nobles were dropping on the floor.

Sir Walter and his two knights ran into the room



crying out at the top of their voices, "A Manny to the rescue !" and on rushing in with my companions I perceived that the far end of the banquet hall was filled with armed knights and men-at-arms wearing French favours in their helmets.

Their leader uttered an oath and drew his sword upon the instant. "Vile Italian," he shouted furiously, "you have betrayed us, but you shall not live to profit by your treachery !"

He rushed forward, and would have assuredly slain the Governor forthwith, inasmuch as he was unarmed, had not Sir Walter Manny stepped before the Lombard and beat down the upraised weapon.

"Base minion of a baser master," said he sternly, "you have ventured into the lion's cage, but the bars are already closed behind you. Surrender your sword and bid your command lay down their arms, or by the might of God, not one of you shall leave this room alive ?"

He took a little whistle that hung about his neck and blew upon it thrice, whereupon those posted below ran upstairs swiftly and presented themselves at the other door ; while at the same time a number of archers appeared suddenly in the minstrels' gallery at the end of the hall with bended bows in their hands.

The Frenchman saw at once that he was completely trapped, so he flung his sword sullenly upon the table without a word, and his companions dropped their weapons as hurriedly as if they had suddenly stung their hands.

Sir Walter, having given orders for them to be secured and lodged under a strong guard, then held a brief conversation with the Governor, and Sir Esmeric, turning abruptly to me, bade me lead Sir Walter and his companions to the Boulogne Gate.

On arriving there we found the guard under arms and, silently taking up a position beside them, we waited beneath the arch wondering what fresh surprise was in store for us.

Outside the gate I heard low voices conversing, and now and then caught the sound of the stamp of a horse and an occasional Gascon oath; after a while a voice said—

"St. Anthony set fire to De Renty! Is he going to leave us to freeze here all night?"

Then another voice said scornfully—

"The Lombard is biting each piece of gold to make sure that it is sound, for these greedy Italians would rather peril their souls than have a bad piece of money passed on them."

Just then I heard a bugle horn wind faint but distinct outside the town on the far-off end of the causeway, which approached the gate.

Immediately the gates were opened at a signal from Sir Walter and, he and his knights in front, crying out, "St. George for merry England. A Manny! A Manny!" led us with a rush into a body of French knights who, though at first astounded at our sudden appearance, nevertheless faced us.

Presently a strong body of our men-at-arms came running along the causeway and, hemmed in the narrow space between the gate towers and pressed by us in front and our comrades at the other side, the astonished Frenchmen had no other choice but fight for their lives.

It was a brief but bloody business, that short affair at midnight at the Boulogne Gate; for each man, opposing the first to hand, grappled fiercely with him, and smote with all his might aiming to kill rather than wound, as far as the darkness would permit him to aim his stroke.

Sir Walter and the sligher of his two bachelors raged like lions backwards and forwards among the French, striking them down right and left; but the taller of the two unknown knights, singling out a big Frenchman, who fought with his back against the chain of the drawbridge, engaged in a long and furious hand-to-hand encounter, which lasted even after all his companions had surrendered.

I had disposed of my last antagonist, by giving him a swinging blow over the helmet that toppled him into the ditch, when I saw the unknown follower of Sir Walter drop on his knee, and at the same time the Frenchman step forward with his mace swung over his head to aim a blow at him.

I ran in and, opposing my point to the French knight, was about to engage him, when the Unknown, recovering himself, pulled me away roughly with the remark—

"No, boy! this honour is mine," and closing fiercely with his foeman threw him heavily to the ground; then presenting his sword at the bars of the other's helmet he called on him to state his name and surrender.

"Eustace di Ribaumont," gasped the fallen man; "but before I consent to surrender I must know into whose hands I yield myself a prisoner."

"Sieur di Ribaumont," said the Unknown, "your cause has been a bad one, but the dishonour of it shall rest alone on the perjured and treacherous prince who sent you on this mission. Your valour hath redeemed your honour, and, as your companions are either all dead or surrendered, it can be no degradation to yield yourself to your lawful King." And the Unknown, raising his vizor, disclosed the features of the King.

"Edward of England!" cried the astonished Frenchman.

"Edward, King of England and France," said the

King haughtily, "and the poor Champion of his own lawful rights."

All of us who stood around remained for a moment or two stricken dumb with amazement ; then, recovering our senses, we lifted our swords and raised a cheer for our gallant King that made the windows rattle in Calais town and brought the frightened citizens out of bed.

We conducted our prisoners back to the Castle and lodged the men-at-arms in the top of the Donjon Tower, with a strong guard posted on the floor beneath them ; as for the French knights, they were entertained at a goodly supper laid out in the banqueting hall.

As soon as the other knight, who had fought under Sir Walter Manny's banner, had disencumbered himself of his armour I recognised the Prince, and the three going into the hall sat down to meat with their late foes.

The Frenchmen, one and all, seemed overcome with shame at the treacherous business they had been lately engaged in, and, although the King and Prince spoke courteously to all their prisoners, I observed they addressed the greater part of their conversation to the *Sieur di Ribaumont* ; after supper, the King, taking a chaplet of pearls from his head, gave it to him saying that he considered him the bravest knight in Christendom and the next day he permitted him to leave the Castle and go his way, being the only one of the prisoners who was released without ransom.

Three days after the failure of this act of treachery the French prisoners, under a strong escort, accompanied the King, Prince, and Sir Walter Manny on board the ships, and set sail for London, while we four squires, who watched them as long as they remained in sight, would have very willingly changed places with the prisoners for the privilege of seeing home again.

## CHAPTER XXV

WE settled down again into the monotonous round of garrison duty, which was rendered still more irksome by the additional restrictions placed on our liberty ever since the treacherous attempt of Philip to gain possession of Calais. My companions were all homesick, and I, too, yearned for England, notwithstanding what news I had therefrom sufficed to wring my heart-strings. The first letter I received from Devonshire, after nearly five years' absence, was from Prior Edmund ; but the news it contained was the saddest of tidings for me. The dreadful plague of the Black Death, which had been stalking through England three years before, had reappeared again ; and my old teacher broke to me, as gently as words could convey it, the account of the death of both my parents from the dread pestilence. They had died within a few hours of one another, and their last words were prayers for their soldier son at Calais.

The same fell disease had also removed the venerable old Abbot, and his stall was filled by a stranger from abroad.

"My incompetence and ignorance precluding me from the succession," as my dear old teacher meekly called the affront put upon him. One of my brothers had fallen in the affair of Neville's Cross, the other had

died of the plague in Norwich ; and I wept as I learned that I was left without a single relation on the earth. The Prior's letter concluded with the tidings that Sir Thomas Siaward had laid claim, as next of kin, to the lands and title of King's Guard and, as nothing had been heard of young Lord Hubert since the night he had disappeared, it was concluded that the claims of Sir Thomas would be confirmed by the King's Chancellor ; I knew full well that if this should turn out I was as surely banished from my dear native Devon as if I had been an outlawed robber or murderer ; and so I was not only left alone in the world but also debarred from visiting the only spot I loved in it.

Two or three months after receiving this mournful letter a London ship-master brought me a small quarter barrel of Malvoisie and a packet, which, upon opening, I found to be a greeting from my master, with injunctions to keep the accompanying gift of wine for my own private use and not to bouze it away in company with thick-skulled squires, who could not value its very rare and curious vintage.

I thought it strange that my Lord, who did not know aught of writing, had omitted to seal the letter and that the writer had not thought it worth his while to mention by whose orders the letter was written ; but, unsuspecting of evil, I had the barrico sent to my chamber, and that evening, at supper with the Squire of the Guard, I had it broached.

I drank very sparingly, because I have always set but little value on foreign wines, preferring a tankard of good English ale to a puncheon of your sour claret or sticky sack, but my companion, who declared it was the most glorious wine that had ever been trodden, drank deeply of my present.

Feeling somewhat faint, and thinking it was the heat

of the great fire on the hearth, I rose, intending to take a short walk on the battlements ; but ere I ascended two or three steps of the staircase, I grew fainter and falling down became senseless.

When I recovered consciousness I found myself in my own bed with a sad-looking old Frenchman standing beside me.

I was very weak and on my arms, which seemed to have shrunk to half their size, I observed several fresh cicatrices as if I had been bled often, and that for some weeks without my having been conscious of it.

I asked the old Frenchman how long I had been there, and was told I had been unconscious for three weeks, during which period he had been attending me.

"What ?" I said, with a shudder. "Have I then been infected with the Black Plague ?"

"No," said the French physician coolly, "rather by the black art, for I found, by my tests and glasses, that there was enough subtle poison in your little cask of rare wine to have slain all the garrison of Calais."

"And my companion ?" I asked, trembling all over, "what of him ?"

"Dead before thy comrades could summon me to look at thee, and buried three weeks ago," said the Frenchman, nodding. "Young sir, you have to thank your moderate indulgence in wine for your present safety, inasmuch as if you had but drank one full glass of that devilish compound, you would now most assuredly be lying in your grave."

The sweat stood upon my brow as I heard these words ; and the same deadly fear came upon me which I had felt in Hal Panton's workshop when I saw the horrid instruments for blinding me on the anvil, and which I had again experienced when Wilmer made his murderous attack upon me in Southampton. I lay back

trembling and wondering why the hand of murder was still stretched out to me beyond the sea ; but I was completely convinced that more than mere hatred was prompting my old enemies to have me done to death and, that in some way in which I was unable to follow, I stood in the road of their accomplishing some dark deed.

In another se'night I was able to go about once more and, as I was too weak to take my turn of guards, the Governor very kindly gave me leave off duty for a month with permission to go out of the town whenever I wished.

As soon as I was fit to sit in a saddle I took my horse " Bayard " and went out daily for a ride along the sand-hills, and after a fortnight I felt the strength coming back to my body in great leaps.

One morning as I was coming back through the town, from a ride amid the dunes, a young French gentleman ran across the street and, putting his hand upon my stirrup, said—

" Pardon me, *Sieur Englander*, but did you not, north of the Seine, unhorse and leave for dying a French knight who then rode this horse ? "

I answered him " Yes," all the while wondering why he should ask me such a strange question.

" Ah, my poor ' Bayard,' " said he, patting my horse's neck ; " I would have known you among a thousand."

I recognised my former foeman and we shook hands cordially.

" And how goeth my brave ' Bayard ' with you ? Well ? In good faith I am glad to see him look so sleek and well-cared-for. Ah ! you English are the only race, except the Infidels, who know how to make a horse look his best and do his best. Ah ! well, since I met you, I have become a Grand Seigneur, for I am now Lord of my brother's estate in *Perigord*."



I congratulated him on his good fortune, but he sighed and frowned and then smiled sadly.

"*Hélas !*" said he mournfully, "I owe my advancement to you English, inasmuch as my brave brother fell at Crécy. But," smiling and nodding to me, "it is your turn to-day, and it shall be ours to-morrow, *mon ami !* and, when we meet next on the field, I hope you will break a lance with me for the honour of France."

I promised him grimly that if we should chance on one another in any future battle I should forsake all other engagements to accommodate him, and with a cordial handshake we parted.

As I dismounted in the Castle baillie, a big, stout man, dressed in green falding, rushed forward and embraced me with the grip of a bear ; and the well-remembered voice of Andrew Privett bellowed, in the tone he kept specially reserved for innkeepers, how rejoiced he was to meet me again.

"Body o' me ! but I am glad to see thee, comrade," he roared. "God's mercy over all of us, I have just learned from thy fellow-squires what close acquaintance thou hast had with Death lately. A wannion on thee, boy ! and, but I did not love thee, I should say the lesson had served thee right for foreswearing honest English ale in lieu of these scurvy foreign wines that sit so sourly on the stomachs of all save pages and Court ladies. How often hast thou heard my opinion of ale ? A hundred times if I have told thee once. Oh, believe me, comrade, there is no drink so excellent for the voice, so gentle for the brain, and so beneficial for the stomach as good, honest English ale ! Wine ! Faugh ! God's mercy on us, say I ; but what folly put it into thy simple head to imagine that Lord d'Mohun—good Lord and kind master as he is—would waste thoughts and barrels of wine on his squires ?"

I confessed that I had acted very foolishly in accepting mysterious presents that purported to come from so unusual a source as my master, who, as honest Andrew very truly remarked, was not given to show many marks of condescension to his inferiors. However, I reminded him that the wisdom concerning anything good or bad generally follows the experience, and cut short all further homilies on his part by asking him what brought him to Calais.

"Why, Guy, to bring thee as fast as boat can sail and horse can trot to our master at Westminster," said Andrew in high glee. "What dost think of that for news, boy? And though London town is like a desert owing to the ravages of the Plague, I warrant thou wilt find in Westminster enow in the way of tourneys, maskings, and such gilded fripperies as you squires delight in, to make thee as happy as the rest of the other fools there. Yet, though the vain town of Westminster is wearisome to me, by my faith I would liefer have it than this dull Castle whereof thou must be heartily sick. So pack thy apparel and whatever other vanities ye may be seized of and come with me, for I have already handed to the Governor the King's sealed command for thy release. Busk thee, busk thee, lad! for the wind is blowing fair for merry England, and the *Margaret* of Dover is e'en now straining her cable in waiting to bring us both to London Bridge."

I need hardly say how delighted I was to receive this news, and, even if my lot had been cast in pleasanter quarters, I should have rejoiced at the prospects of seeing my native land after so long an absence; but the news coming to me, who had spent one year in besieging Calais and nearly three years shut up guarding it within, was as a release from a prison. I hastily got together what few articles of value I possessed, bade

farewell to the Governor and my comrades, got my horse on board, and that evening stood on the poop of the *Margaret* with Andrew by my side, and watched the towers and walls of Calais fade away in the Channel mist, while the ship rushed swiftly before a snoring wind for merry England.

When I came on deck in the morning we were running up the Thames with the wind and tide following us from astern, and, with a swelling heart and straining eyes, I stared at the low-lying shores of Kent that stretched on our larboard side.

The shore, Heaven wot ! is nothing but flat sand and mud slob all the way up to London town ; and that morning, moreover, a thin, cold fog hung over it, but to me it seemed Paradise, and I grudged the short time I refrained from gazing at it when I descended to the cabin with Andrew for dinner. Long before my companion had finished his meal I started up and sought the deck ; and, notwithstanding his grumbling remarks anent my want of good-fellowship, I steadily refused to descend to the cabin again, but remained leaning on the bulwarks with my eyes fixed on the shore all the way during our passage up to the Tower.

## CHAPTER XXVI

WE landed at the Tower steps, and whilst I was seeing to the disembarkment of "Bayard," Andrew went off to an inn hard by and hired a mount for himself. As we rode through London I observed on every side evidences of the fell visitation that had lately harried the city. Grass was growing in the streets, half the houses were deserted, and the doors and windows of the other half were fast closed as if their inhabitants were endeavouring to shut out the streets from their sight and memory.

Verily, half London at that moment lay dead in the plague pits, and the surviving half was silent and trembling with fear.

The few horsemen we met reined their horses back under arch or doorway in order to allow us twain to pass, which seeming courtesy contrasted so strangely with my last recollection of London folk that I was for some time wondering at their behaviour, until it occurred to me that it was their fear of infection which made them so chary of elbowing us.

The very soldiers on guard at the Lud Gate appeared to be unnerved by the same universal dread, for they hastily opened the gates long before we came near, drew back nervously on our approach, and did not

venture to close them after we passed until we had gone a full flight from the far side of the Fleet Bridge.

We breathed freer when we left the town behind, and, setting spurs to our horses, stretched forward in a joyous gallop over the marshes to Westminster, where we arrived about two hours before sunset.

We were detained a few minutes at the Gate House while Andrew, with many rumbling oaths upon the laws that demanded such customs, searched through his wallets for the sealed order which permitted us to enter the Royal city. The archers on duty looked narrowly at the order, but were evidently satisfied as to our credentials, for they raised no objection to our passage, and we accordingly rode in.

I cast my eyes about to see what changes had been wrought in the city since my last visit six years back, and was much struck by the difference between the Westminster of the past and the Westminster of that dreadful year. The houses, indeed, were as handsome and as numerous as when I had last seen them, but the old air of joyous abandonment was gone.

Westminster did not exhibit the same outward sores and cicatrices of the visitation that were so noticeable in London, but nevertheless the finely appalled gallants that ruffled it through the streets appeared to walk as if in fear of the touch of that grim Bailiff who alone could venture to serve his writ within the walls where no other mandate ran. All wore an apparently strained air of gaiety. Their voices were loud and their cheeks were flushed with wine, but each one cast shifty looks on those he met, and drew his cloak about him tightly, as if he dreaded brushing against his neighbour.

Andrew brought me to a very neat little inn fast by the

northern entrance of the Abbey, and, pulling up before it, called for the ostler in so subdued a tone of voice that it was scarcely louder than the coo of a wood-cushat. I was so much astonished at this marked change in honest Andrew's method of summoning an inn that I was unable to do aught than stare blankly at him, during which time the old Lancashireman continued to wait patiently and shamefacedly without so much as opening his mouth. No one appeared, so Andrew ventured to raise his voice about a semi-tone higher, and hailed the house a second time.

"Ostler! Within there!" said he appealingly. "I prithee hasten, Master Jack Harden, for I am in a most monstrous hurry."

Presently an overgrown boy, with a thick thatch of straight, yellow hair that stood out from his round head like glued straw, came forth from the inn very leisurely. He made no excuse for his tardy coming, and took away our horses with such little reverence to my old friend that I was more astonished than ever, so I ventured to ask Andrew if there was any one sick within on whose account he did not raise his voice more lustily.

"Hem—hem, comrade," said Andrew, with an odd hesitation in his manner; "you see I have made this tavern mine inn for so long that—that I—in short do not like to disturb the house, which is, in sooth, a respectable house—a very respectable house and an exceedingly honourable house of change. The host—or I should say the hostess—is but a poor, lone widow woman who hath recently lost her husband by the plague. By my fay! a very perfect hostess and a most honest gentlewoman. So, comrade, as I do not like to vex the poor distressed soul by raising my voice, I am perforce restrained from talking in a befitting manner

to that child of Satan who hath so dallied in his attentions to us."

This explanation of Andrew's conduct made a deep impression on me, and I was in the middle of a speech wherein I was praising his kindly consideration, when my fine discourse was cut short by the appearance of a very buxom dame on the threshold of the tavern door.

"La ! Master Privett, how very quickly you have come back," said she with every indication of being well pleased ; " not that the time you have been away has not appeared long to me, in good sooth ! Come within at once, Master Privett, and have a cup of hot sack, which you must stand in need of after your long journey."

Andrew shook his head very firmly, and his lip and moustache curled disdainfully.

" Then a cup of spiced ale ? " pursued the hostess— (Andrew shook his head a second time, but not so vigorously as heretofore)—" and I shall bring it to you to your own favourite seat by the ingle nook, which is waiting for you ever since you left for France, nor have I suffered any one to occupy it in the meanwhile. I prithee come in at once, Master Privett, and take off your wet boots, or you shall assuredly be taking a chill."

A very wistful look appeared in Andrew's eyes, but he shook his head again and replied that he was bound according to orders to make Lord d'Mohun immediately acquainted with my arrival. However, he added how very grateful he should be for the spiced ale on his return ; and, having whispered to me not to call too loudly for aught I required, and so suspend for the nonce his own golden rule, he turned away from the tavern with a sigh, and set off in search of my Lord.

When my companion had taken his departure I entered into converse with the buxom hostess, and

presently discovered for myself that she was anything but the downcast creature that Andrew would fain have had me believe. She referred very frequently indeed to her deceased husband, and threw in many pensive sighs as if to eke out the measure of her sorrow ; but she appeared to have so strong a counterpoise of pleasure in telling me of the quaint sayings and conceits of Andrew, that I had a shrewd thought hidden away in my inner self the good dame was not averse to a second venture in matrimony, and that Andrew Privett himself already basked in the sunshine of her mature favour.

The praises she poured forth in honour of Andrew's wit, person, accomplishments, good behaviour, and sweet temper were cut short by the return of that worthy himself, who bade me abruptly follow him, and started off in a great hurry towards the Abbey. Accordingly, I clapped on my cap and followed him without further delay.

He led me across the Sanctuary Yard to the western front, opened a little postern door, and, after traversing some dark cloisters, conducted me into the venerable building and straight up the darkened nave.

The great Minster was deserted by monks and lay worshippers alike, for it was too late in the day for the latter and as yet too early for the former to chaunt their evening devotions.

The jingle of our spurs and the hollow sound made by our heavy riding-boots on the worn pavement woke the echoes in arch and vault, and intensified rather than disturbed the solemn silence. The evening sun was low, and it threw down long red and blue stains on the pavement under foot from the painted windows and left deep shadows among the arches and fretted capitals of the pillars overhead ; and gradually a vague sense of



awe came upon me as I accompanied my careless companion side by side towards the rood screen where the shades lay as dark as a black velvet pall upon a coffin.

Neither of us addressed the other. I asked no question of Andrew as to whither he was leading me ; he, on his part, vouchsafed no word of information, and so we came silently to a low, narrow arch which opened into a tiny chapel close to the rood screen, and here he motioned me to enter, and then turned away and left me.

There were two men within the chapel. One was sitting on an oak chest with a scroll spread out on the altar rail, the other was standing up and bending over his shoulder. Both had their backs turned to me.

The man standing up spun about quickly at my entrance ; and, recognising him as Lord d'Mohun, I bent my knee, and, rising at his signal, stood cap in hand waiting until he should address me. The man who was sitting on the oak chest shifted his position half round, and, glancing over his shoulder sharply, appeared to be scanning my face as closely as the failing light in the little chapel would permit.

He was a tall man, dressed in a plain suit of black velvet, with a broad cap of the same material pulled down on his forehead. On one side of his head-dress there was a great puckered rosette in the Venetian fashion, from which fell two long, broad bands of velvet, one length of which he held before his mouth and chin.

I had plenty of time to observe the details of his plain but rich dress, as we three remained silently looking one at the other, until the echoing footsteps of Andrew Privett, growing fainter and fainter, were suddenly cut off by the distant sound of the closing of the postern door.

The man in velvet coughed and muttered something

about the river fog affecting his throat, and Lord d'Mohun broke the silence by addressing me quickly and sharply as if repeating a speech learned by rote.

"Engledew," said he, "I have sent for you from Calais as being one who could benefit the King and yourself in a matter with which you are well acquainted.

"This is Master Montresseur, the King's private secretary, and you must speak freely and answer fully any questions he puts to you. Mark you well, Engledew! There shall be free favours and advancement for you, if you speak truthfully. But I warn you, there must be no paltering or hugger-mugger in your replies, or you shall find to your cost that it is ill-work dallying with a king's secretary."

I bowed my head and answered that my duty to my King and himself was sufficient bond that I would serve them both in all lawful matters without considering fee or reward.

"Fairly spoken, young sir," said the man in velvet, bending forward with one hand leaning on his knee, and the other holding the end of his broad velvet cap band before his mouth. "Fairly spoken, like a good soldier and a good subject."

"Do you remember," said my Lord, with a very pale face and a twitching mouth, "in the spring of six years back being brought down to the banquet hall in King's Guard at midnight for the purpose of drawing up a certain deed?"

My heart grew faint and sick within me, as I caught a glimmering of what these questions tended to, but, as my oath had not bound me to more than silence about the tenor of the covenant, and the names of those present, I answered in a faint voice that I remembered the circumstances.

"So far, so good," said the King's secretary, coughing gently, "and I have no doubt that your excellent memory shall serve you well yet."

"Now lythe ye, Guy," continued my master, in the same hurrying way as he had previously spoken, while his face grew whiter and whiter in the gathering dusk. "Since then, grave reasons have arisen—great reasons of State, which you could not understand, nor are there any just grounds why you should understand them—that require—nay, demand that you—at the King's command, mark you!—that he should know—in short, that you must now state to Master Montresseur the wording of that covenant, letter for letter, and name for name, as it was signed and sealed in your presence."

My heart stopped with fear and, in the solemn silence of the twilight, I could hear a stray bat that had wandered into the Minster fluttering about in the great nave without.

I mustered all my resolution, and answered as steadily as I could—

"My Lord, the same oath that binds your honour and hopes of salvation also seals my lips and binds mine too. *You* will not damn yourself to everlasting shame and the torments of hell's lowermost pit by breaking that oath. Why would you press *me* to do so?"

"I command you to speak of a matter upon which the weal of your King and the happiness of a nation depend," said my Lord fiercely, "not to answer me with parables and monkish riddles. Will you answer or not?"

"Nay! now, nay! my Lord Baron," said the Secretary, coughing softly. "Ye do but frighten the poor lad with your angry words and fierce looks."

"I prithee, my good boy," said he gently, "not to let any foolish scruples about a wicked oath stand between

you and the duty that you owe to your King and country. To-morrow, I shall have the holy Abbot of Westminster release you of the bond of secrecy laid upon you by this traitorous covenant."

"Nor monk, nor abbot, nor the Holy Father himself can free me from the shackles of that accursed oath which was laid upon my unwilling conscience," said I, shuddering at the recollection of its wording. "I did not take it willingly, but I will not break it willingly."

"What," said the Secretary, "you refuse to speak even if released of thy oath?"

"Aye," said I firmly, "not for the Crown of England will I speak."

"Will not! Will not!" burst out furiously the man in velvet, in a tone of voice that I detected immediately. "Have a care! young squire, have a care! There are curious instruments and engines in our Tower of London which have picked out secrets from stronger limbs than thine. Steel and cords that can wring the marrow from thy bones and yet leave thee living, but in such a case that if thy mother stood by and saw thee she would kneel and pray for death as a sweet boon for thee."

"My Liege," I cried, sinking on my knee, "my poor body and life have been yours since I could bend a bow, and I am ready to yield up both wherever or whenever it pleases your Majesty. But my soul's salvation is my own, and I look to give as good an account to Heaven for its conduct as I can of my services to you as my King."

The King took off his velvet bonnet and threw it on the oak chest with an angry gesture, and then turned to Lord d'Mohun.

"See, Sir John!" said he, with a bitter laugh, "how Fate mocks me at every turn. Rise, boy! rise!"

said he impatiently, "no harm shall come to thee, and the sanctity of thy oath shall be as much respected as thy master's. Here, my Lord Baron, had I placed my last hope and one of mine own subjects, and he a beardless squire stands between me and the stemming of a gathering flood."

And the King clasped his hands before him, palms turned downward, and with his face sunk deep in the bosom of his velvet doublet, walked backwards and forwards on the worn pavement of the little chapel with the quick and restless pace I had marked in a newly-caged lion which I once saw in the Tower.

"Sire! Sire!" said my Lord, with a fierce gesture of his strong hands, "give me leave to take the villain by the throat and tell him face to face before your assembled Court what he is. He cannot! He dare not! refuse my proffered gage, and——"

"I shall lose a dear, but thick-pated friend," burst in the King, "in case his lance sends you headlong in the dust, and if you should slay him he becomes the doubly glorified martyr of the common people and the cause he is even now bartering to us for these forfeited lands. No! No! No! a thousand times No! Sir John," and he struck his hands together in such fierce anger, that the brown skin on his fingers turned white with the violence of the blow.

"I have told thee, cousin, that a headlong charge with lance and shield cannot win this fair field—where the pacification of a host of subjects, the healing of old wounds, the love of a people, aye! the very stability of our Royal power itself—make the prize so splendid that they dwarf the late victories into petty skirmishes.

"The villain comes to me with his forged parchment, for I am convinced that it is forged, and shaking it in our face demands a Royal guerdon for his felony—and

I—oh, God of Hosts ! must accede to his demands or, by refusing them, strengthen the conspiracy against ourselves and the Church.”

“The Tower, Sire, is a safe ward,” muttered my Lord darkly. “Throw him into the Tower ! Strike off his head !”

“Hear the man talk ! kind Heaven,” cried the King angrily. “Why, cousin, by doing so I would but play into the cunning hands of those he is now even trafficking to sell. If I struck off his head, or sent my known and trusted friend to dash him down in the lists, then would he be added to the tale of poor traitors his cunning thrust up against the block, and the whole of them would be canonised saints within a se’night. No ! No ! This man’s downfall must come from less noble hands than mine or thine, d’Mohun.” He paced up and down the chapel for a while, and then suddenly stopped and faced my master.

“Ha ! By Beckett’s bones I see a way,” said he exultantly. “Is thy squire as good a lance as he is a lusty sword-and-buckler man ? I can vouch for his excellence in that vein myself, as we stood foot by foot for a bloody quarter of an hour at the Boulogne Gate in Calais last New Year’s Eve.”

“I warrant he is as good a lance as men twice his weight in your Majesty’s chivalry,” said my Lord austerely ; “but he cannot challenge as he is but a simple squire.”

“That is but a little matter, and can be easily set right, provided he is willing,” said the King smiling.

“Hark ye, squire, will you swear to me, by your hopes of heaven, to do battle honourably and manfully for my cause, if I lay the accolade upon thy shoulder and give thee means to support the dignity withal ?”

My heart, which had so lately stood still at the near

approach of a horrible death, beat so fiercely with joy that I could hardly speak distinctly as I said—

"My King's cause is mine always, except my duty to God should forbid an evil or dishonourable quarrel."

"Thou thick-witted dullard," replied the King testily.

"Aye, but 'twas always the same with you West Countrie sailors and soldiers—stubborn, slow, and true as ever. Know, boy, that the Order cannot hold any one whose offences against God or man would sully its shining ranks. In short, I ask you to do battle with a wretch, who on his own base, brazen showing, stands traitor to his God, his King, and the poor fools, dead and living, he hath pushed to treason and ruin. One who coolly avows to our Royal selves (under my safe conduct easily passed and deeply regretted) that he is a perjured and foresworn catiff to the dead he has betrayed and the living he is now offering to sell. Now answer me briefly, yea or nay, Sir Squire, and mind your answers are round and direct, for I have sounded deeper by a bucketful in this well of treason than half these traitors wot of. You own you were present when this covenant was drawn up at King's Guard six years ago. Would you know it and the names upon it if you were to see it again?"

"Assuredly, my Liege," I replied, "inasmuch as I engrossed it, and should know my own writing among a thousand manuscripts."

"And you remember the wording of it?" asked the King, fixing his piercing blue eyes upon me, "and its general tenor especially?"

"Alas! your Majesty," I answered. "I remember it but too well."

"Then is this a copy?" said he, taking a scroll out of his doublet suddenly and putting it into my hands.

I scanned it closely, and had wit enough to see that the scrip, that purported to be a copy of the one I drew up, was a brilliant and ingenious blending of the original covenant with a resolution concerning a number of Church and land grievances then on the eve of vexing England.

In addition to the names that the original bore, many others of mighty power had been added, whose titles have no bearing on my history, and I therefore shall not set them forth here, but there was more than one Royal name among the list. I handed the paper back to the King without a word.

"Speak, boy," said he eagerly. "Is that the same document you drew up at King's Guard?"

"No, Sire," I replied.

"Were all those names attached to it? One more or less matters little. Quick, answer—Yes, or No?" He spoke as if he were in sudden pain, and his mouth worked painfully, and his eyes shone anxiously as he regarded me.

"No, Sire," I replied.

"And you will be prepared to prove that to-morrow evening with sword and spear upon him who affirms the contrary, so help you God and His Holy Gospel?" pursued the King.

"I shall prove my words are true or die like a true man," I said solemnly, "so help me God and His Holy Gospel."

"So, that will suffice for the present," said the King. "He shall watch his armour here in this chapel to-night, in accordance with the custom of the Order. You shall be his sponsor to-morrow, Sir John, at the Abbot's Mass, and after the ceremony keep him apart in the cloisters until I send for him to the Abbot's lodging. Thou shalt appear alone, Sir Squire, dressed in complete



mail, and I will confront thee with him whose villainy it is thy duty to unfrock, and if he does not own his treason, then, lad, thou must only cast down thy gage and prove it on his carcase. But hark ye, and mark ye ! Thou shalt wear thy visor down, and, though thou may'st rack his soul by every reference thou canst think of connected with his perjury and treason, yet neither by word, look, nor sign, must thou give him any hint as to whom thou art, else he would see, through thy advancement to the Order, a trap for a combat which he might otherwise decline."

I signified my comprehension of these instructions, and the resolution to carry them out if necessary at the cost of my life, whereupon the King resumed his velvet cap and withdrew in great spirits with Sir John d'Mohun.

## CHAPTER XXVII

**T**HAT night, in accordance with the established rites of the Order, I spent the lonely watch by my armour which lay on the altar steps in the little chapel.

Pacing slowly backwards and forwards, I thought over the sudden changes that two days and a few hours had wrought in my fortunes. Two days before I was a nameless squire doing duty in a lonely guard-room in an alien land, with no prospects of either changing my exile there or ever aspiring to the golden spurs.

I thought how a few hours more would see me a belted knight, and a few hours back had seen me threatened by a prison or a grave, and I hardly liked to conjecture what another day might work in my lot. Perhaps a lance-thrust through my body and the end, or my unknown foeman lying at my feet and a King's favour. Not that I counted too much upon the King's good-will, for though, as he himself had remarked, I was dull-witted, yet I had enough good sense to see he used my advancement to foil this unknown traitor, and pushed me forward to meet him as indifferently as he would have checked an adversary at the chess-table by matching a pawn against the other player's rook.

If I fell—well, he did not lose much. If I won, there would be less ill-feeling among the common people if

their champion was slain by one who sprung from their own class, than if the conqueror was of the proud Norman stock.

I recognised well the terms on which I received my spurs, and I accepted them gladly and proudly ; but the exalted honour of being a King's Champion did not render me blind to the reasons of my selection.

In the morning, after Mass, I was duly armed, took the vows of the Order of Chivalry, and knelt to receive the last unresented buffet of the sword from the hands of the King himself ; after which I partook of a hasty breakfast in the refectory, and repaired with Lord d'Mohun to the cloister in accordance with the King's commands of the evening before.

After a wait of about an hour or so a monk came to us, and, making me sign to follow, led me to the Abbot's lodging.

Outside the door were four armed men of the Royal Archers, who made way respectfully for me, and, stepping into the Abbot's room, I saw the King sitting at a table with two gentlemen behind him, and a third, with his back turned to me, facing him.

The clash made by my armour, as I bent my knee to the King, caused the third gentleman to turn with a start ; but the shock, caused by my abrupt entrance, could not have affected him as much as the sight of his face did me, for I recognised my old enemy, Sir Thomas Siaward, with an exclamation which must have sounded deep and ghostly within my barred helmet.

He fixed a piercing look upon me, as if he were trying to gather my identity from my eyes through the bars of my closed visor, and for a space we each looked at the other, while the King examined a piece of parchment with a long string of seals impressed upon the margin.

At length his Majesty said in a grave, deliberate fashion, "Ere this matter goes further, Sir Thomas Siaward, I intend submitting the script to the scrutiny of this knight, who was present at the drawing up and signing of this treasonable bond." He handed me the parchment, and continued in low, stern tones, "By the honour of your Order, Sir Knight, and your hopes of salvation, is that the document which was drawn up and sealed in your presence in the Castle of King's Guard on the date mentioned at the head of the names?"

I took the script and saw at a glance that it was a forgery, so clumsily executed, as far as the writing was concerned, that I did not require to look at it a second time, so I answered, with the words coming hollowly from my helmet—

"It is not, Sire ! and if Sir Thomas Siaward affirms it is, I say he lieth in his throat, and undertake to prove his treason and false statement upon his body," and I threw my gauntlet at my enemy's feet.

His face turned the colour of old ivory, his mouth drew back into a yellow-lipped grin of hate, and a flake of foam bubbled through his clenched teeth, which were bared like those of an angry dog. He made a step forward to take up the gauntlet, but, stopping short, drew himself up and said—

"Ere I accept this challenge I must see the face of my accuser."

"I am bound by a vow," I replied, "not to disclose my identity until I prove the truth of my accusation."

"Ha !" said Sir Thomas scornfully, "think you I will accept the challenge of any mountebank or base-born archer who, tricked out in borrowed plumes, comes with a gage and a vow, forsooth, against disclosing his right to challenge a gentleman of birth. For aught I

know he may be one of my own scullions of King's Guard, who, hearing vague talk of things he hath never witnessed, thinks to startle me with his mysterious mummary."

"Sir Thomas Siaward," said the King coldly, "the first objection against raising this knight's glove need not check your pride, for I give you my honour he is as well entitled to bear coat armour as you yourself are."

"Give me some token you were really present when the covenant was drawn up in King's Guard. Tell me some word spoken, some chance happening," said Sir Thomas, glaring at me as though he would spring upon me.

"Yes," I answered slowly. "One knight said to another, whose tryst *you* have so well kept, 'REMEMBER LANCASTER! ROYAL LANCASTER!' and you said in reply, 'Eagles that fear to soar must e'en content themselves with the food of the meaner fowls.'"

"This may be all hearsay," said Sir Thomas, shaking with fury, "but, hearsay or guess-work, I will e'en take up your gage, and make you eat your words whenever it pleaseth the King to fix a day for battle. Meanwhile I suppose I have your Majesty's safe conduct to come and go betwixt London and Westminster?"

The King assented coldly, and, bending his knee, my foeman, with a parting look of the most malignant hatred at me, left the Abbot's lodging.

When the sound of his footsteps had died away the King turned to me and gave me my instructions anent the ordeal.

"Sir Guy," said he crisply, "to-day is Monday, and on Wednesday morning the Prince holds jousts in the tilt-yard. Eat and drink prudently in the interim. Be at the lists three hours before noon on Wednesday, bear

yourself then as stoutly as you have hitherto done and leave the rest to Heaven."

He waved his hand to signify that the interview was over, so I bent my knee respectfully and withdrew.

I went to my inn, and, having disarmed myself and changed my apparel, went forth to take the fresh air and calm my troubled mind by a stroll along the river-side. I was about to cross the little ornamental bridge that spanned the mill stream to the west of the Abbey, when I observed a large hawking party of the Court scattered through the meadows, and, as solitude fitted more with my mood than the presence of gaiety, I turned, and walking back through the Royal gardens, stepped on to a little terrace paved with white marble, which ran beneath the Palace windows and overlooked the silver Thames.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

THE terrace glittered in the bright sun, and was so still and peaceful that at first I thought I was the only living creature on it. Presently, however, a peacock, perched on a sundial at the far end of the terrace, gave a cluck and a cry to attract my attention, and spread out his splendid fan of feathers in the sunlight, whereupon I glanced in that direction, and observed for the first time that a young lady, clad in a robe of saffron silk with a thin woof of crimson shot through it, was leaning on the light iron balustrade and feeding two graceful swans in the river underneath.

Her head was turned from me, but there was something about the poise of the neck and the fashion in which the white and gold fillet was bound about her curls that seemed familiar, and, while I was endeavouring to make up my mind about approaching or retiring, she solved my difficulty by turning and disclosing the fair face of Alys Brydonne.

I took off my cap and stepped forward a pace towards her with my hand stretched out, but, raising her eyes to mine and uttering a scream, she crossed herself hastily and cried out—

“Queen of Angels ! shield and guard me from the influence of all spirits that walk in daylight as well as those of the midnight hour.”

I advanced a pace or two nearer, but she shrank back against the wrought-iron balustrade from my outstretched arms, and, covering her face with one hand, put out the other as if to keep me off.

"What harm did I do you when you were on earth," said she, trembling all over, "that you should revisit me here to work me evil?"

"Alys! Ladye Alys," I cried in bewilderment, "I cannot fathom your meaning. I am your very devoted servant, Guy Engledew, alive and well, and willing to obey your commands in all things."

I took her hand in mine, and, though she tried to withdraw it, I bent down and kissed the tips of her slender fingers, whereupon she looked at me with straining eyes for a full minute, and then swayed slightly.

I thought she was about to faint, and in some alarm drew near and put my arm about her, but repelling my hand she stepped back unsteadily a pace or two, and then sitting down on a low marble seat burst into a passion of weeping.

I stood looking at her in a perfect agony of mingled pain and amazement at this unaccountable paroxysm of grief, and endeavoured by every trick of my clumsy skill to soothe her distress.

"You must not mind this silly weakness," said she between her sobs, "you must not mind me—I am so ashamed of myself—and yet I have been ill and my weak and overwrought feelings must have outlet through my tears, or my heart will burst with the pressure of its own sick fancies. I prithee leave me, Guy, I prithee leave me, and I shall be myself again in a few minutes."

I sat down beside her on the marble bench, and taking her unresisting hand in mine, vowed as prettily



as my clownish manners would let me, that I would not leave her until I heard her laugh once more ; and, though she smiled and laughed and wept by turns, and begged me to be gone at intervals, I sat beside her a long hour, nor did she seem displeased that I did not obey her.

Little by little and by indirect replies I gathered from her how she had heard of the trifling incidents of my life in camp and field and garrison, and was astonished to discover how much she had learned of my dull existence in Calais.

"And then," said she, with a shudder, and turning away her face, "I heard from a knight of Devon—a certain Sir Thomas Siaward—that is—I—I asked him if he knew aught of you—being but natural—as he is the Governor of King's Guard in the West Countrie—which, you know, you yourself told me of—and he answered me—that—that you had died of the Black Death in Calais. And I grieved for you—as why should I not ?—inasmuch as you were so brave in my behalf on the marshes without Westminster, and I took much shame to myself for repaying your courtesy by frowardness. I have been ill lately, and my nerves are like an overstrung lute ; so—so, you cannot deem me worthy of blame," continued she laughing, and the merry ring of her voice carried my memory to the day, years back, when I had met her first—"because I screamed and prayed when I was confronted so suddenly with an apparition which I deemed came straight from the winding sheet and grave."

She had withdrawn her hands from mine as she finished speaking, and regarded me with such a composed smile upon her dainty face that it seemed as if she were ashamed of her late weakness. I bent forward and capturing one of her hands, held it fast, while I said with a beating heart—

"Alys, God and the King be thanked for it, but I have gained my spurs."

She started and flushed like a sunset and her eyes sparkled brightly. I thought of the words spoken by my good comrade, Bevis Mayne, on the day whereon we rowed about Southampton Water, and I looked straight into her eyes, and my heart took much comfort in what I saw there.

"Alys," I said softly, "I am a belted knight, and am free to speak now, what I dared not even think of when I was friendless and unknown. Sweet Alys, you looked upon me a while back as if I had returned from the grave. Let me be your very loving knight and bachelor until the time cometh when I shall be laid in the grave in serious earnestness."

I ceased, and waited with a throbbing heart for her answer. She sat erect, and looking straight before her, exhibiting neither sorrow, joy, nor anger at my words, and but for her heightened colour and quickened breathing, she showed no evidence of having heard me.

The river rippling at our feet against the terrace, and the rustling of the peacock's fan of feathers behind us, were the only sounds that fell upon my tortured ears as I waited for her to speak.

At length she said, still looking straight before her, "Sir Guy Engledew, I am the King's ward, to give and bequeath in marriage to whomsoever he willeth, as freely and with as little regard for my feelings as are paid to the cattle of a poor man when he disposes of them in his last testament."

"But as far as your own will goeth," said I, with my heart sinking within me, for I saw only too clearly the power that might stand between us, "do you yourself give me any hope? Say that you could learn to love

me, and I shall remain unwed and continue your devoted lover and true knight until the end of my days. Oh, speak, Alys, dear heart! Speak! and decide my future."

She did not answer, but standing up unclasped the white and gold fillet about her head and let her thick clustering hair fall over her white neck and forehead.

My velvet cap lay on the ground at her feet, with the thin remnants of the frayed glove still fastened in it, and picking it up, with a sudden motion she plucked away from it the poor worn favour and thrust it into the bodice of her saffron robe. Then, before I could recover from my amazement, she bent down her face to mine and kissed me on the mouth.

I sprang up with outstretched hands, but, eluding me with a little laugh, she turned away and fled as lightly as a fawn up the marble steps, across the Palace gardens and disappeared around a corner, leaving me standing with the white and gold fillet in my hand. For a full minute I remained staring at it in stupid surprise, until gradually its significance stole upon me as I recalled my own words to the masked lady at Calais. So I fastened the new favour in my cap, and with a heart brimming with happiness, left the Palace grounds.

Next day I again repaired to the Palace gardens, but, though I lingered a long three hours, and saw many beautiful and splendidly-dressed ladies pass, I did not catch sight of the flutter of a saffron robe, or a glimpse of the face I so much longed to see.

Nevertheless, happy in my new-born happiness, I sought my couch that evening and slept the sweet sleep of one whose mind is free from all carking anxiety, although I knew well that a lance-thrust on the morrow might for ever send me to a sleep that would know neither dreams nor restlessness.

I arose betimes and armed myself with the assistance of Andrew, whom I had appointed to be my squire of the body for the time, but not before I had carefully examined and set right every defective rivet in my harness with my own hands. I mounted "Bayard," and, an hour before the appointed time, set forth for the lists in company with Andrew, who, lost in wonder at my assuming golden spurs, deemed my lately conferred honours were mummeries which would obtain for me the sharp censure of Lord d'Mohun later on.

I bade him hold his peace and that I should explain all the seeming mystery, ere two hours were over, both to Lord d'Mohun's satisfaction as well as his own ; he accordingly accompanied me to the lists, where a page, who was evidently in waiting for me, led me without a word to one of six small pavilions at one end which faced six similar ones at the other end of the lists.

I gave one hasty glance around the lists, and saw that the seats were filled with gaily-dressed ladies and courtiers, but, as I knew none, I dismounted, and leaving my horse "Bayard" with Andrew outside the pavilion, entered it alone.

As soon as I drew the curtains before the door, I threw myself on my knees, and having commended my cause and soul to Heaven, in a short but fervent prayer, rose, removed my helmet, and sat down on the single plain couch which constituted the sole furniture of the pavilion, to wait, with what calmness I could muster, for the time to sally forth.

While I thought of what great stakes I was about to play for, the mingled laughter and cheers of the spectators outside grated harshly on my ears.

The clang of the trumpets sounding the charge, the crack of the headless tilting-spears as they splintered in the career, and the gay, light laughter of the ladies

made me think somewhat grimly how that mirth might be changed shortly when they saw two men, both sworn to fight to the death, engage in the real conflict instead of the mimic one that so much amused them.

I remained calmly and collectedly knitting my resolution together, until I had so controlled and bridled my anxiety that I felt almost indifference, when a page entered and told me with a bow that the lists waited for me.

I resumed my helmet, closed my visor, and, leaving the pavilion, mounted my good horse "Bayard."

Having settled myself firmly in the saddle, and satisfied myself as to the length and grip of my stirrups and lance, I gave the reins a shake and galloped into the lists with the butt of my lance resting on my cuisse.

I rode straight towards the elevated daïs where the King and Queen sat, and reining up "Bayard" with a demi-volte, dropped the point of my lance and bowed my helmet until the white and gold favour on it fluttered among my horse's mane.

No cheer or applause greeted me, for I was unknown, and the very whiteness of my shield, which bore neither device nor motto, made the audience regard me the more coldly.

I raised my head and saw Alys, behind the Queen's chair, start suddenly, as she recognised her favour upon my helmet, and I knew that among the courtly and callous throng that one heart at least said to itself "God bless thee."

The King made an impatient signal of dismissal ; so, recovering my lance, I spurred "Bayard" straight across to one of the pavilions, before which hung Sir Thomas Siaward's shield, and, reining up, struck it a sounding blow with the point of my spear, in accord-

ance with the rules of the tournament when issuing a challenge *à l'outrance*.

I rode back to my post, and, as I passed the Royal daïs, I heard the Queen say in a low, tremulous voice, "No ! Say no, my Lord" ; and the King answer in a low voice, "Peace, ladye, peace !"

Ere I reached my place, Sir Thomas Siaward, armed completely and mounted, had taken his place, and two of the Royal heralds in a loud voice were commanding silence. I dared not look again towards Alys, lest the sight of her pale face should unnerve me, so I fixed my eyes on my foeman and settled myself firmly in the saddle.

We were both desperate men, and were about to do battle for more than our mere lives.

With him, it was unlimited power, broad lands, and very existence ; with me, it was for a King's cause, a fair wife, and the avenging of my dead master, to whom I owed all.

I sat immovable as a statue, with my lance and reins gripped tightly and my eyes fixed hard on Sir Thomas, while one herald droned through my challenge and announced me as a knight bound by vow not to disclose his identity until the combat was over.

When he had finished, the other herald cried out—"Here stands Sir Thomas Siaward, a knight of Devon, willing to prove this stranger knight lieth in all that he affirms."

I heard the King's Marshal say, in clear, ringing tones, "Gare both ! Sound, heralds ! and God defend the right !" whereupon both Sir Thomas and I struck the spurs deep into the flanks of our horses at the first note of the flourish, and bore straight for one another at full speed.

When we met I struck him full in the throat, the

lance splintering up to the burr that guarded my hand ; at the same time I felt a shock on my forehead as if the heavens had fallen on it, and, as I reeled back in my saddle, the clasps of my helmet gave way and it went rolling on the ground.

I kept my seat with a vice-like grip of my knees, and, though half stunned and with the blood pouring from my mouth, yet I was perfectly sensible of the danger I was in on account of having my head unprotected, so, recovering my seat in the saddle and dropping the broken truncheon of my spear, I drew my sword.

Sir Thomas was struggling hard on the short grass, endeavouring to regain his feet ; and as I dismounted to resume the combat on foot, he succeeded in rising on one knee and drawing his sword, but almost at the same moment fell back helplessly.

His helmet had burst open with the violence of his fall, and he lay with closed eyes. At each labouring breath he drew, his life-blood issued in little bright bubbles from around the splinters of my lance, which stuck out from the mail tippet round his throat. I saw that he was wounded unto death, but I was resolved that he should make amends for his wicked treatment of Lord Alured ere he himself passed to judgment. Presenting the point of my sword at his face, I called upon him to surrender. He gasped faintly—

"I surrender into stronger hands than thine. Fetch me a priest—I am dying."

"No !" said I fiercely, waving back the Benedictine monk who had advanced to shrive him. "Back, Sir Monk—I will have no priest approach this man until he owns his treason."

"My son ! my son !" said the horrified monk. "You would not slay the soul as well as the body of this unhappy creature ?"

"Ay! would I, if he do not right the living and own his treason to the dead," said I sternly. "Look up! look up! Sir Thomas Siaward, false knight and traitor, and see who holds the welfare of your black soul as well as your life in his hands."

My enemy opened his heavy eyes and fixed them on me with a look which at first was vacant and dazed; but gradually a gleam of intelligence, that deepened into a frenzy of terror, overspread his swarthy face.

"Guy Engledew?" said he, while the sweat of fear and death ran down his face. "Alive!—and my overthrower! Truly! truly! the hand of God is in this. Come hither, monk, and you, Sir Marshal, and listen while I make what restitution my short measure of life allows me."

And then, while I leaned faint and heavily on my sword close by, Sir Thomas Siaward confessed such a long account of treason against the King and my late Lord Briwere, that I could hardly believe there was so much villainy in one man.

Before he had finished his shameful story he fainted, and, leaving him to the care of the Benedictine, I made my way with much difficulty to the foot of the Royal daïs, and dropping on my knee, said—

"Sire! the traitor hath confessed his treason and forgery in the presence of the Marshal and yonder monk."

As I heard the King's voice answer something indistinctly, I felt the warm blood trickling from my mouth and ears; then I heard a shriek which, even in my heaviness, I recognised as that of Alys, and, raising my head to reassure her by a smile that I was unhurt, found I could not see further than my outstretched hand, and about then, I think, must have been the time I swooned.



## CHAPTER XXIX

**W**HEN I came to my senses I found myself in my lodgings, attended by honest Andrew Privett and the buxom hostess. I was very weak in body, but nevertheless brimful of impatient curiosity to know how long I had been in bed and all that had happened since the moment I lost consciousness, but, beg as I would, I could only get becks and nods from Andrew; and, when driven wild by his perverse silence I would start raving at him, he would withdraw altogether, and leave me, like a spoilt child, almost weeping with vexation and helplessness.

By the end of three days, during which period I was visited daily by a leech, I was strong enough to sit up in bed. A week after the evening I recovered consciousness, I had mustered strength enough to throw anything within reach of my hands at Andrew whenever he put his trick of silence upon me. Whereupon the forester argued, from this return of vigour, that I was fit to hear the sound of another voice than mine own; and accordingly he and the hostess entered my room, and, sitting on each side of my bed, answered my impatient questions with a deal of unnecessary caution and hesitation.

By slow degrees I learned that the point of Sir Thomas Siaward's lance had caught the crest of my helmet, and,

in addition to bursting it into pieces, had given me a slight concussion of the brain, from the effects of which I had lain delirious for three weeks.

As for my foeman, he had expired before he could be borne out of the lists ; and, notwithstanding my hatred of his memory, I was glad that he had been spared the shame of being degraded, inasmuch as I can conceive no more dreadful end for a belted knight than to have the spurs hacked off his heels, his sword broken over his knee, and himself hanged head downward—which disgraceful fate would assuredly have been his if he had survived. My other murderous enemy, Bassett, had been arrested, tried, and executed in Southampton for high treason, on the confession of his knightly accomplice ; and finally, after a long and wearisome debate between my two nurses as to my state of health and fitness to receive tidings of great joy, Andrew yielded to the counsels of the hostess, and handed me a bulky packet sealed with great cobs of wax. I tore it open and uttered a glad cry, for it was nothing less than the King's warrant appointing me to the governorship of King's Guard, with the yearly salary of five hundred golden crowns.

" Dame," said I hurriedly, when I had read the document through, " would you please withdraw, and allow Andrew to help me on with my clothes, as I want to rise and go across to the Palace."

Both my nurses exchanged a look of consternation.

" There," said the hostess with decision, " there ! Did I not tell you, Master Privett, what would be the result of letting the young gentleman have that packet ere he was fit to receive such gladsome tidings ? You see, it has turned the poor youth's mind so that he is on fire to go forth, and if he leaves his couch, his death shall be most assuredly on your head. Aye ! on your head, Master Privett, mark my words."

Poor Andrew, who had been against my receiving the packet all along, did not attempt to gainsay the hostess, but he regarded me with a dumb look of entreaty.

"Surely, surely," said he soothingly, "if you will it, comrade—Sir Guy, I crave your pardon. If you wish to don your clothes and go across to the Palace I shall not gainsay your will, but you are certain to do your health a hurt for the sake of a dull walk, with nothing at the end of it but an empty house and a few yawning soldiers on guard."

"What!" said I aghast, "has the Court left Westminster?"

"Aye! by this cross," said Andrew, devoutly kissing his crossed thumbs. "They have gone, silk gowns, gold doublets and all, a good fortnight since."

"Then," said I wearily, "I shall remain in bed," and I dashed the sealed parchment angrily on the ground, for all the joy of my advancement had flickered out of my heart in a moment.

Andrew and my hostess looked at one another silently for a few minutes, and finally the dame gave a significant cough, but Andrew frowned, and muttered under his breath that I was by no means sufficiently strong to bear such news.

The hostess nodded her head impatiently, and I, wondering what this further mystery could mean, looked inquiringly from one to the other, whereupon Andrew heaved a great sigh, and after a cough or two ventured to say—

"Sir Guy, at my own request and with Lord d'Mohun's permission, I have been transferred to your service—that is, if you will have a weather-beaten old forester like me in your train—and I hope you will for old times' sake, for I love you dearly and shall serve you faithfully."

I interrupted my old friend by grasping his hand and vowing it was one of my dearest wishes.

He thanked me very heartily and continued, "I am no longer young, Sir Guy—not that I am so very old either, so you need not laugh dame—at least, I have arrived at an age when it were fitting I were settled down soberly and respectably—and therefore—in short, Sir Guy—I have decided—that is—we——"

"We have decided upon marrying one another," broke in my hostess with a dip and a blush. "Only Master Privett cannot find the words or courage to tell you and we both hope therefore for your consent."

I could hardly refrain from tears of weakness and vexation when I heard this mighty secret, which I had feverishly hoped would have proved to be either some news, or perhaps even a message from my beloved Alys ; forgetting, in the selfishness of my own love, that folk in that state are utterly oblivious to the anxiety of others in like case.

However, I concealed my disappointment, and hastily told the good souls that they had my consent to marry whenever they pleased ; and as soon as they withdrew, thought with some bitterness how easily and smoothly the courtships of the humbler prosper, while the love affairs of those of higher rank clog and halt at every turn.

The contemplation of my recent good fortunes gave me but little pleasure when I considered I had only hoped for them in order to attain Alys, and that, beyond her assured love, I was as far off from possessing her as ever.

I suppose my peevish thoughts retarded my own recovery, for another week passed ere I was fit to leave my chamber and yet another week before I was fit to mount my good horse "Bayard" and set out with Andrew by easy stages for my new wardship.

Our journey was without incident, except that on entering Southampton I observed the ghastly head of Bassett stuck above the Bargate, almost at the very spot where he had attempted my assassination years before.

As I passed beneath the arched gateway, I recollected with a shudder that his dead face bore the same look of terror and surprise on it which I observed on the countenance of the Day Owl when I struck him down on the high-road to Torre, and which I had also noticed on Sir Thomas Siaward's face when he lay dying at my feet in the lists in Westminster.

I have seen many men fall in battle, and have observed that their faces frequently retained the feelings that were in them at the moment of their passing, but their consciences must have been less troubled than those three I mentioned above, for I have never detected on any of them that expression of terror and surprise, and often wondered if the countenances of all bad men wear that startled look after death.

Conflicting emotions mingled very deeply in my heart when, four days after leaving Southampton, I rode across the drawbridge of King's Guard, which, a little more than seven years before, I had passed as a poorly dressed boy of the great Abbey, drawing my crippled father after me in his oak chest.

Across that very drawbridge I returned as the warden of the mighty Castle, and its garrison drawn up in the courtyard did me homage with lowered spear-points while four trumpeters blew a flourish to welcome me.

My eyes were filled with a dew of mingled joy and sorrow as I sat upon my horse looking around at each well-remembered corner of the broad courtyard; and I might have sat there an hour had not my old comrade and fellow-page, Tom o' the Hobs, advanced very respect-

fully to hold my stirrup and tell me that supper was awaiting me in the great hall.

Although that evening and the following days that grew into weeks and months my changed fortunes confronted me at every turn, yet I did not feel by any means the happy man I ought to have been. The feeling that my measure of content was but half full and the seeming impossibility of ever obtaining the better portion, for which I would have willingly surrendered the first half, made me thoughtful and solitary. A joyless lethargy settled down heavily upon me. I took long, lonely rides through the forest or along the seashore, or shut myself up in my chamber in company with my books, and felt myself gradually drifting into a state of morose gloominess without being able to save myself.

One evening two mud-splashed couriers wearing the Royal livery arrived at the gate and, on being admitted to my presence, informed me that the King and a small retinue, on their way to Dunster, would arrive next morning at the Castle, where his Majesty intended to lodge for the night.

While I was giving directions for the preparations of the quarters to be occupied by the Royal party, a sudden suggestion of hope entered my mind, which I resolved to put into instant execution.

A good twenty miles from King's Guard, in the great forest of Dartmoor, there lived a forester who possessed two matchless falcons, on which I had long cast envious eyes. The price that the fellow demanded for them put them quite out of the reach of a poor man like myself, for, indeed, they were peerless creatures of their kind, nor do I believe there was a King in Europe who had such swift and well-trained birds.

Although it was about three hours off midnight I

ordered "Bayard" to be saddled and, setting out alone, rode as fast as the good steed could bear me through the dark forest and over the lonely waste to Dartmoor.

I was well acquainted with the King's passionate love of sport and the specially keen interest he took in hawking, so my simple plot was to excite his desire of possessing these two noble birds, present them to him, and, under cover of my gift, press for leave to claim the hand of my love.

It was a risk, I wot well, but then I had often risked life and everything else for much less before ; moreover I knew that the King had a habit, in the hurry of his joy, of giving away things he oftentimes had neither the right nor power to bestow.

I arrived at the forester's cabin about an hour after midnight, and, after hammering and shouting at his door for a good ten minutes, brought him suddenly forth in his shirt with a bended bow in his hand and a couple of arrows clenched between his teeth.

He was very naturally surprised to see me at that late hour, and, telling him briefly upon what errand I had come, we soon effected an exchange of goods.

I left him a made man, and turned homeward the poorer by a half-year's income, bearing the two precious falcons in a little osier cage at my saddle bow.

I put "Bayard" to his best pace and, anxiously watching my way and the faint glimmer in the east by turns, succeeded in reaching King's Guard by daybreak, when I left the falcons in the hands of Andrew and sought my chamber.

## CHAPTER XXX

**I** WAS weary from want of sleep, and worn out by my ride, but I only delayed long enough in my chamber to bathe my face and hands, and change my soiled clothing for that more suitable to receive the Royal party.

After swallowing a hasty breakfast and a cup of whey, I sought my old watch place in the eastern turret, wherefrom I had so often gazed abroad in my boyish years and climbed up to the beacon grate. I waited there with my eyes fixed on the road and, at the end of an hour or so, perceived a dazzling cavalcade approaching King's Guard.

When I first caught sight of it it was about three miles off, but, even at that distance, I observed the flutter of ladies' veils and riding-robcs among the party ; and as I descended to the Baillie and ordered the gates and walls to be manned, the thought was in my agitated mind that the Queen, and possibly her maids of honour, were with the King.

I stood bareheaded at the gate to receive my Royal master. He gave me a friendly nod, and cast one pleased look round the noble building that had sheltered six generations of the name of Briwere, but which treason and malice, alas ! had reft from that name for



ever and delivered into his hands as a costly and unavailing sacrifice.

As I bent my knee and held his stirrup, I glanced sideways from his foot, and observed to my great joy that the Queen and Alys were close behind him. I assisted her Majesty to alight, whereupon she gave me a look full of so much archness that I flushed as much as when she bade Alys pay me with a kiss for my trifling services on the marshes of Westminster, and became so confused that I could scarcely stammer out an invitation to repair to the banquet hall, where breakfast was already awaiting their Majesties.

When the King had partaken of some refreshment he asked me, to my intense delight, if the meads and streams around King's Guard afforded good sport in the way of coursing and hawking.

"None better, Sire, in your dominions," I replied with a beating heart, "and if your Majesty hath any desire to see a cast or two, I shall let loose a brace of falcons which have not their peers in Europe."

The King's face brightened, and he stood up immediately.

"A bold assertion to make, Sir Guy," said he smiling, "and I shall make you prove your words, or eat them within the hour. To horse! to horse! I am all impatience to see these vaunted birds take a circle and a stoop for the honour of the gentle craft."

Ere he mounted, Andrew brought him the hooded birds on the hawk-frame, and he hung lovingly over them for a space, admiring the beauty of their shape and the evident signs of their good breeding.

"Mount then, and away! sans ceremony, friends!" he cried eagerly, after he had looked his fill upon them. "Away—away at once—I am on fire to see these beautiful creatures soar. Faith, Sir Guy, if

they fly as well as they look your boast is not an empty one."

We had not ridden far, when, from among the sedge of the little brook at the foot of the hill whereon King's Guard is built, a fine white egret rose with a clang, and soared away in the blue sky like a drifting snowflake.

When the egret was a good flight off, the King cried out to Andrew that it was time to cast off; but my old comrade, who had been previously instructed by me to allow the quarry a longer start than usual in order to show off the utmost speed of the falcon, waited a moment or two longer ere he cast off the first bird which sped after the egret like an arrow.

I watched the two mount higher and higher until they disappeared from our straining eyes in the clouds overhead, but the last we saw of them was the egret still leading, and I prayed hard for the gallant bird on which I was risking so much.

The King looked far more disappointed than I—for he apparently had no belief that he would ever see the falcon again, and I had some faint hope as yet that it might prove victorious.

"There, blockhead!" said he petulantly to Andrew Privett, "I told you that you were giving too much law to the quarry, for there never was a bird yet hatched that could overtake the distance you gave. Sir Guy, you have lost a good bird through your man's mis-handling."

I was beginning to fear that Andrew had over-estimated the speed and powers of my costly purchase, when he pointed silently above, and in a moment or two, we were all aware of a speck in the sky, which gradually grew sufficiently plain to show that the falcon and her quarry were falling, locked tightly together.

The King was greatly delighted, and with a loud hallo he spurred his horse in the direction where the two birds fell; and on following him, we found the egret quite dead, and the falcon, though greatly shaken by her desperate struggle, otherwise unhurt.

"By Saint Hubert," said the King, "you did not talk idly when you said these were the rarest birds in merry England, for I do not believe there is a hawk in all Christendom that could have overtaken this crested heron at the distance."

I saw my opportunity had arrived, so I dismounted, and took the bird upon my gauntlet.

"If your Majesty will do me so much honour," said I, "you shall make me proud to think I was the giver, if you accept the two."

The King's eyes sparkled as he said, "A noble gift, and worthy of a King, Sir Guy. Yes," added he hastily, as if he feared I might endeavour to back out of my offer, "I accept your splendid present as a souvenir of the best flight I have ever seen."

The King and Queen Philippa were sitting side by side, with their horses' heads almost touching one another. I stood on foot with the falcon on my wrist and my cap in my hand, and while the King, with a look of delight on his face, took the falcon from my gauntlet, the Queen, raising her eyebrows slightly, looked at me in a very significant manner.

"It is in sooth a royal gift, as you yourself say, my Lord," said she in her pretty French way of speaking, "but then, when one receives a gift so handsome, it is always reckoned to be unlucky not to give something to the donor, no matter how trifling, wherewith to handsel it."

"Yes, yes!" said the King, somewhat uneasily; "what would you wish me to handsel it with, Sir Guy?"

"By your permission, Sire, to pay my addresses to one of her Majesty's maids of honour," I answered, with a quickened breathing.

"Which of them?" asked the King, and there was cold suspicion in the tone of his voice and the look in his eyes.

"Alys, daughter of Sir Harry Brydonne, he who was slain at Halidon Hill," said the Queen, speaking rapidly. "The boy and girl are sick for love of one another, and it were nothing but an act of grace to set the poor souls at rest."

"Oh," said the King, looking very much relieved, "I thought he meant the Countess of l'Huy."

I had great difficulty in restraining my laughter, inasmuch as the Countess, although the wealthiest lady of the Court, and still unmarried, was about thirty years my senior. However, I knew very well that the King looked with extreme distrust upon all likely suitors for the venerable lady's hand, and, remembering that those who laugh when Kings are serious oftentimes weep in secret afterwards, I answered very gravely that I had not ventured to cast my eyes so high, and prayed himself and the Queen to give me their permission to sue for the love of Alys.

"Why, surely, surely!" said the King cheerfully. "She is a sweet young thing, and her beauty and virtues shall make up for her small dower, and, as the Queen seems not disposed against this affair, I shall excuse your presence for the remainder of to-day; so you can take your Ladye for a walk in the greenwood, and ask her views, and if the demoiselle says 'Yea,' why then, when she returns with us from Castle Dunster a month hence, she shall be wed, and I myself shall give the pretty bride away."

I thanked the King for his gracious favour and con-

sent, and mounting my horse, followed him back to the Castle.

As I assisted the Queen to dismount in the Castle baillie, I asked her in a low voice of thankful gratitude how I could ever repay her for her help.

"By being very good to Dame Brown's niece," said she softly, "you shall be very good to me, for I love her almost as much as I do her aunt. Oh, Sir Guy Engledew, Sir Guy Engledew, you have won her nobly, therefore guard her nobly."

I approached Alys, and in a few low words told her what the King had bidden me tell her. She coloured deeply, but raised no objection to accompany me on horseback through the greenwood, and I accordingly led her towards my father's stead at King's Dene. Neither of us spoke, for each of us was busy with our own thoughts, and, as for mine, they were anxious ones, for I was as yet by no means confident of the possession of my beloved.

I drew up at the well-remembered stead wherein I first saw the light, but the place was so changed that no one but myself would have known it again. The rafters were naked to the winds, the door had rotted from its hinges, the shutters fallen from the windows, the once white floor a sodden, rotten platform of green boards. It looked a wretched place in its desertion and ruin.

Very gravely I assisted Alys to dismount, very gravely I took her hand and led her without one word into the ruined interior. She stared at me in a half startled, half anxious way, her eyes asking an explanation, but I released her hand, and, walking over alone to the corner wherein my mother's and my father's bed had stood long ago, knelt down and bowed my head in silence. What I asked in that moment is nothing to any one who happens to read this history of my poor

life. It is a secret that is alone known to my Maker and myself. Then I rose up from my knees and confronted my frightened sweetheart.

"Alys," said I very gravely, "ere I ask you for your plighted word, I think it is but fair that you, who come from the proud Norman stock, should know from what rank I myself come. In this lowly room was I born, and in such lowly surroundings was I reared. My parents and forebears possessed no higher heritage than an unshaken loyalty to their King and their master, and I myself, laying aside my knighthood, am no nobler or less honourable in my poor way than they were. Alys, think well ere you answer. Can you give your love to one so humbly born as I?"

For answer she put her arms around my neck, and said very tenderly, "Dear heart, I love you, I love you, I love you! I loved you from the moment I first saw you on the marshes outside Westminster; I loved you when I heard you plead for a prison with your Lord, when you might have asked for your own welfare and advancement; but I love you a hundredfold for this brave and manly confession. Dear Guy, I would take you for my Lord before all the world, if you were a beggar clad in rags."

We kissed one another very lovingly, and even now, in these days of my wealth, prosperity, and old age, I would undergo a double share of the sorrows and persecutions of my youth for the happiness of recalling the dear moment when I first heard that sweet confession. We mounted our horses and rode home slowly to King's Guard with a great happiness in our hearts, and on our way thither settled that our marriage should take place when she returned from Castle Dunster in the following month with the King and Queen.

The next day, as in duty bound, I accompanied the

Royal train as far as the confines of King's Guard, and would gladly have journeyed farther, but was dismissed there somewhat curtly by the King.

I was therefore obliged to remain at the boundary stone and watch them pass away in the distance, but the only glimpse of the Royal party I remember seeing was a saffron dress and a cherry-coloured riding-veil, on which I fixed my eyes until a turn in the forest hid them from me.

## CHAPTER XXXI

**A** WEEK after the King left I rode across to Torre Abbey, and asked to see Prior Edmund.

"There is no Prior of that name here," said the lay brother, who took my bridle, with a grin ; then observing the look of pain which gradually spread over my face, he added hastily—

"At least, he is Abbot, since our jolly King passed through Torre a few weeks ago, when he sent our late Abbot back to Louvain, saying, he was not going to have his laws broken under his nose by having foreign monks ruling in his English monasteries, and so our worthy Prior was appointed in the room of the late Abbot."

I was greatly rejoiced at the promotion of my dear old friend, and when I was led to him, we remained a long minute grasping each other's hands, not trusting our mouths to give utterance to all that was in our brimming hearts.

When I ventured to speak of myself, I told him of my advancement to the Order, of my approaching marriage, which I begged him to solemnise, and finally of my appointment to the Wardenship of King's Guard.

This last news fairly took his breath away.

"What, boy?" said he, "Warden of King's Guard—and what of Sir Thomas Siaward?"

I told him, in as brief a fashion as I could, of his death



in the lists, and when I had finished, he clasped his hands and raising his eyes, said—

“Aye, truly ! Even in this world the wicked prosper but for a short season. Aye, truly ! the vengeance of God armed your hand.”

As he spoke the door opened, and a young monk entered. The Abbot sprang up hastily, crossed himself in terror, and repeated in an awe-stricken voice, “Aye, truly ! the vengeance of God.”

I observed, by the slow, shuffling gait of the young monk and the pitiful little way he threw out his hands as he walked, that he was stone blind, and a great pity for the unhappy young creature filled my heart.

I wondered vaguely where I had seen his haggard face before, for it seemed strangely familiar, and was racking my memory for a name to fix to it, when he spoke, and I instantly recognised him—

“Father, I have been so lonely all day, may I sit awhile with you ?”

The voice was unmistakable ; but it was changed from the old imperious tones to those of patient sweetness and there was a testimony of long suffering in the low, sad accents.

“Merciful Heavens !” I cried, “are you my dear master’s son, Lord Hubert Briwere ?”

“Who calls on the name of the unhappy Hubert Briwere ?” said the poor youth, trembling all over, as though in an ague fit. “This is a trap to drag me hence—I tell you, he is dead ! dead ! these five years back. Who are you, that you should ask me aught of him ?”

“My Lord,” I said, “my lawful Lord, it is I, Guy Engledew.”

He advanced trembling to me and, putting forth his thin and wasted hands, said in a tone of sad entreaty—

“If thou art Guy Engledew, do not strike me in the

face, though I deserve it greatly." Then running his hand lightly over my face and hair, he said "Yes, it is he," and going down upon his knees, he bent his head and meekly kissing my feet, entreated my pardon, while I burst into a hot flood of tears.

I raised him up and, embracing him, bade him be of good cheer ; assuring him that the King would restore him to his estates, especially since Sir Thomas Siaward's treason was fully established, and that he himself, and his confederate Bassett, were dead and powerless to work us further harm.

"No ! no ! my good Guy," said he sadly, "my cruel kinsman (upon whose soul may God have mercy), although he closed my eyes for ever to the world, at the same time opened my self to my inner self, during the five years I lay blind and raving in the vaults of my own Castle. Two days after I escaped by your devoted help (and with base ingratitude refused further aid from you) his men overtook me and brought me back a prisoner to King's Guard, where Wilmer, that miserable hireling of his to whom I had ordered the punishment of the lash, repaid my cruelty by inflicting on me the greater cruelty from which you see me still suffering. But there, I have said enough of that part. During the latter end of the fourth year of my imprisonment a sense of the great guilt of my former wicked and selfish life came upon me, and I yearned to amend what existence might be left me. Whether it was my prayers, or a fear that the place of my imprisonment might be discovered, or that he deemed Torre Abbey a safer place to conceal me, I do not know, but he conveyed me hither just before he set out for London.

"He laid an oath upon the late Abbot and myself, that I would renounce all attempts to regain my rights and keep my identity a secret within the convent walls

while I lived, and on those terms he left me here six months ago. Although in my conscience I believe I could in justice claim mine own now, as such promises extorted by years of barbarous cruelty can scarcely be binding, yet believe me, dear Guy, I am happier here than I could ever be elsewhere. Leave me here in peace; yet, if you would rejoice me, come and talk with me when you come near Torre as an earnest of your forgiveness, but keep the secret of my poor existence whilst I live."

We embraced and parted and, three weeks later, when I and Alys stood before the high altar of Torre while Abbot Edmund made us twain one flesh, I observed the worn, sightless face of my true Lord turned towards the altar and, beneath the shade of his white cowl, saw his lips breathing prayers for our welfare.

He died, after a long period of self-denying sacrifice, while nursing the sick poor during the last visitation of the Black Death, and most of the humbler folk of the West Countrie, who looked upon the blind monk of the White Canons as a saint, little knew that he was their lawful Lord.

Of those others whose doings were closely knit with mine, my venerable old friend, the Abbot Edmund, was spared for many long years, and died full of peace.

Lord d'Mohun's name, better known as Earl of Dunster, to which honour he was raised after the last glorious war with France, shall endure longer than the brasses upon his honoured tomb.

My dear, honest Andrew and his buxom wife lived with us for many long years at King's Guard until, the poor old man rendered peevish by his inability to accompany me any longer abroad into the greenwood by reason of his advanced age, fretted himself to death.

Bevis Mayne, when I last saw him in Southampton, had grey hairs. He was as merry and hearty as ever but was still unmarried and as full of jibes against women as when we were boys together in London town.

As for the remainder of mine own simple history, it would be a weariness to the reader and myself to recount the further campaigns I went through and the kindly marks of good-will I received from my noble King and his dear lady, the incomparable Queen Philippa.

The earlier part of my life with its joys, sorrows, hopes, and realisations—that part which tells the history of the young love of my youth—is a period that is sweeter in the old-time memories of my beloved Alys and myself, and in thus recording our joint story we offer it as a humble tribute to Heaven and thoughtfully and thankfully bless the Giver of all good for our great happiness.

**FINIS.**









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